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<b>Author</b>	West, Gary J.
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**Farm, Family and Neighbourhood in Post-Improvement  
Perthshire: An Historical Ethnography**

**Gary J West**

**PhD  
The University of Edinburgh  
1999**





# STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that I am the composer of this thesis  
and that the work is entirely my own.

# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines certain aspects of social organisation within farming communities in Perthshire during the 'post-improvement' period - the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through a process of historical ethnography involving consultation of both documentary and oral source material, an attempt is made to examine the issue of *belonging* and to identify and evaluate the cultural markers of the farming life mode as expressed through the collected written and spoken witness narratives.

The topographical variety to be found within the Perthshire landscape has encouraged the development of a wide range of agricultural production forms within the county. Following an analysis of the specific manifestations of the agricultural improvement process within the Perthshire context, a number of themes relating to household organisation and community cooperation are examined. Divisions of labour based on both age and gender are addressed in relation to the organisation of family farming, with specific emphasis upon the roles of children - a greatly neglected theme within Scottish agricultural historiography. The investigation then widens out to include the 'temporary family' of the farm bothy, a mode of accommodation which consistently appears as a central theme in the life story narratives of male farm servants consulted during this investigation.

The concept of neighbourhood is analysed through the two modes of communal labour arrangement commonly found within Perthshire - exchange labour and charity labour. It is argued that these formed central links in the local informal economy, and that they were essential to the maintenance of social cohesion and the construction of community identity. The Perthshire evidence is outlined and analysed and then discussed within the context of recent and current thought relating to theories of reciprocity and cooperation.

A review of relevant literature reveals a paucity of scholarly historiographical works relating to Perthshire, and the researcher's participant observation of life in that county leads to the assertion that the portrayal of local heritage there relies largely on a shallow, sensationalist and hackneyed interpretation of the Perthshire past. This thesis represents an attempt to help to redress this imbalance by offering a more focused and phenomenological treatment of the daily and seasonal routines and relationships of those whose livelihoods were earned directly from the Perthshire soil.

Length of Thesis: 100,000 words.

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It is of great regret to me that I will be unable to share this final version with Dave West, Dave MacDonald, Jim Mollison, John Fisher and Donald-Archie MacDonald who have since passed away.

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# NOTES ON THE THESIS

## Abbreviations Used

AKB	A.K. Bell Library, Perth
CSD	Concise Scots Dictionary
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
NMS	National Museums of Scotland
NSA	The New Statistical Account of Scotland
OSA	The Statistical Account of Scotland (Old Statistical Account)
RCSS	Research Centre for the Social Sciences, University of Edinburgh
SLA	Scottish Life Archive, National Museums of Scotland
SND	Scottish National Dictionary
SSS	School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh
TSA	The Third Statistical Account of Scotland

## Interview Transcriptions

Full transcriptions of a selection of recorded interviews are provided in Appendix Two, and a number of illustrative extracts from these are integrated into the main body of the text. An attempt has been made to represent the dialect of the informants within the transcriptions, as is common practice within the field of oral history, and hesitations, repetitions and verbal stumbling have been edited out where this does not affect the integrity of the narrative: such omissions are marked with a series of three dots. Unintelligible passages are marked thus [ ? ].

## INTRODUCTION

My interest in Perthshire's rural past stems essentially from a long-standing fascination with my own family roots. While annual visits north to the Sutherland homes of my mother's people brought me a certain familiarity with the ways of the crofting existence, my immediate environment was coloured by regular visits to more local relatives on my father's side of the family, most of whom continued to live and work on farms in and around Perthshire until recent retirement. The second youngest of eleven surviving children, my father spent the first few years of his life on the Lowland farm on which his father was grieve at Airntully on the Tay some eight miles north of Perth, before moving north into the Highland part of the county when his father took over the tenancy of Balnabeggan, a small hill farm above the village of Grandtully in Strathtay.

My father, being the youngest son and coming of age in a period when machines had begun to replace both people and horses, found that his future was to be outwith farming, but I suspect to this day that his heart remained in the fields, and his stories and anecdotes of farming life certainly lit a spark in my young imagination. Informal chats over cups of tea at the farming homes of his brothers and sisters - my uncles and aunts - led this spark to grow to a flame, and eventually to a burning desire to find out as much as I could about this way of life which was only just out of sight over the horizon behind me. Talk of bothy living, horsemanship, ploughing matches, lovedargs and feeing fairs held a rosy romance for me which may well have been far removed from reality, but which nonetheless provoked in me a lasting fascination with our recent rural past. While this led in time to research in libraries and archives, this past has been brought alive for me largely through the spoken words of my own extended family.

Focusing mainly on the period between the beginnings of large-scale farming change in the late eighteenth century and the disappearance of the working horses around 1960, this thesis represents my attempt to document and understand the way of life of those people from whom I have come.

The present introduction serves two main functions. Firstly, the principal objectives of the thesis are set out in order to identify the central issues to be explored, and a detailed discussion of the methodology employed in order to achieve these aims is included. Secondly, a brief geographical, demographic and historiographical survey of the county of Perth is presented in order to build the contextual foundation for the main body of the dissertation.

### **Thesis Objectives**

The objectives of this thesis operate at two levels, one personal and one academic, although the current fashion for thoroughly reflexive approaches towards cultural research serves to unite these two motivations (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Mintz: 1984; Stoeltje, Fox and Olbrys 1999). At the personal level this project represents a search for what Kenneth Whyte refers to as a 'grounding' (1998: 34), a personal odyssey to explore and understand my 'roots'. This motive is partly genealogical, but also involves the search for a sense of 'place' (Relph 1976), a desire to understand the life modes followed by virtually all my known paternal forebears. It is unashamedly nostalgic, but as Lowenthal reminds us (1985: 4-13), nostalgia is ubiquitous in our relations with our past. It is a building block of individual and collective memory; it can distort, certainly, but it can also inspire. This, then, is 'autoethnography' (Reed-Danahay 1997), a cultural study of my home county and my own people.

At the second level, but closely bound to the first, this work seeks to explore the concept of *belonging*. What are the overt and underlying factors which combine to create a sense of identity and belonging at localised levels - family, farm unit,

and neighbourhood? How did individuals negotiate their membership of 'the community'? How do they articulate this retrospectively in their narratives? What are the cultural markers upon which their belonging is pegged and their identities constructed?

I am certainly not alone in posing these questions, for as Sharon MacDonald has recently argued (1997: 131) both scholarly and public preoccupation with 'local' versus 'incomer' debates has placed 'belonging' at centre stage in the anthropology of Britain. The tendency has been to concentrate on the 'ethnography of locality' (Cohen 1982: 2) leading to a collective attempt to uncover and understand the ways in which culture is 'exhibited' and how 'membership of a culture is experienced' (ibid.: 6). Belonging is conceptualised in opposition to *not* belonging: distinctiveness is recognised, celebrated and consciously promoted by the members of the cultural group themselves. In this discourse many of these writers follow the thinking of Frederick Barth, who argues that people become most aware of their cultural identity at its boundaries, difference being asserted most strongly where cultures meet (Barth 1969).

This consensus of approach has been manifested in the ethnographic study of a number of rural and coastal communities within Scotland which share the qualities of geographical remoteness and small-scale modes of agricultural production, particularly crofting (Cohen 1982a; Cohen 1987; Fox 1982; MacDonald 1997; Mewett 1982; Parman 1990). The 'peripherality' (Cohen 1982a: 7) of these communities serves to intensify their otherness as perceived by outsiders and locals alike, a point firmly underlined by the very presence of the anthropologists. But how is belonging articulated in a region which adheres more closely to the label of 'core' than 'periphery'? How is it negotiated in an area which cannot be neatly categorised in terms of a single mode of agricultural production? How is it constructed within a geographical unit that is neither



entirely highland nor entirely lowland, but is partly both? These issues are of central importance to this thesis.

'Belonging', expressed most often as 'identity', has also been a common theme of interest to both historians and sociologists within Scotland in recent decades. Most of this attention is aimed at the national rather than the local context, however, as scholars attempt to make sense of the specific cultural constructions which have emerged within the peculiar circumstances of a 'stateless nation' (Beveridge and Turnbull 1989 and 1997; Broun *et al* 1998; Calder 1994; Ferguson 1998; McCrone *et al* 1995; Nairn 1977 and 1988; Pittock 1991). Where a regional approach is adopted, it tends to adhere to a cultural dichotomy model, with many researchers presenting themselves as historians of either the Highlands or (less often) the Lowlands (Campbell 1994). While revisionist historians have produced much excellent work in relation to Scottish identity, at times this concern with the 'macro' has served to hinder understanding of the local. In Perthshire, popular perceptions of local culture are constantly blown up to the level of 'Scottish' cultural identity: the interpretations of local 'heritage' must fit into the perceived template of 'Scottishness'. The version of Scottishness employed is stereotypical, based on tartanry, sensationalist history and the romantic beauty (rather than functionality) of the physical landscape. While this has been reflected to a certain extent within Perthshire historiography, it is reinforced daily in the marketing and support of the principal industry of tourism, and has led to the construction of a shallow and hackneyed interpretation of local heritage and culture, couched always in a national rather than regional framework.

It is for this reason that in this thesis I attempt to examine localised articulations of belonging within my native county to try to provide an alternative version to that normally presented, moving attention away from sensationalism towards the minutiae of the routines and relationships of everyday life. Here, the concept of



belonging is explored through the principles of ethnography rather than through 'history'. But the approach is diachronic and the subject is historically situated, and so I therefore employ a methodology I term 'historical ethnography', a defence of which is set out below. Within this framework, a basic model of cultural ecology has been constructed in order to accommodate the regional variations identified within Perthshire and to build a context which steers a course away from excessive and misguided emphasis upon an imagined highland/lowland dichotomy.

## **Methodology**

### *The Ethnological Perspective*

This thesis is not a work of objective history, for my aim has not been to establish 'the facts' about the economic and social development of farming in Perthshire in the post-improvement period. Such a study would have necessitated a very different methodological approach and a more involved and wider consultation of conventional documentary sources. Had this been the intention, then such works as Ian Carter's pioneering *Farmlife in North-East Scotland* (1979) would have provided an ideal template to follow (with or without the Marxist colouring), or else Leah Leneman's work with the Atholl papers could have been taken as a blueprint for similar studies within surviving estate records from other districts in Perthshire (1986). The approach to the study of Lowland agricultural history employed by Richard Anthony, on the other hand (1997), would have provided an alternative route towards an understanding of certain aspects of the recent Perthshire farming past. His socio-economic investigation based on regional case studies owes much to the influence of Carter and has undoubtedly helped to fill a glaring void in the serious analysis of this genre of twentieth century Lowland rural history. These scholars have made important contributions in this general field, and have

certainly heavily influenced my own thought process during the research for and construction of this thesis.

Nonetheless, this present work belongs essentially to a different tradition, one which owes as much to the field of social or cultural anthropology as it does to the world of the historian. The gap between these two is bridged by my own discipline of ethnology and it is undoubtedly to the twentieth century European pioneers of this subject that I have turned for closest guidance. Ethnology as taught and practised within Europe today certainly represents a broad church but it is essentially concerned with the study of cultural tradition, not as a quaint and moribund survival of the past, but rather as an ongoing *process*. The emphasis is normally placed upon both material and oral cultural forms, a legacy of the gradual marriage of the concepts and sub-disciplines of folklore and folklife<sup>1</sup>. If a distinction can still be made between these, this thesis leans towards the latter, for it is the social organisation and material culture of Perthshire farming people as opposed to their more creative verbal art forms which are of central importance to this work.

Folklife first emerged under that name as an academic discipline in Scandinavia in the early years of the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> although one can certainly trace its antecedents back in a direct line to the British antiquarian and folklore scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries<sup>3</sup>. The so-called 'father of European ethnology', Sigurd Erixon, founder of the influential journal *Folkliv*, was the principal pioneer of modern folklife scholarship. His influence can be seen in the work of recent and present day European ethnologists such as Stoklund and Steensberg in Denmark, Bringéus in Sweden, Peate in Wales and Evans in

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed summary of the development of ethnology as a recognised discipline in its own right see Fenton 1985: 1-55.

<sup>2</sup> A chair of Nordic and Comparative Folklife Studies was established at Stockholm in 1919.

<sup>3</sup> These include Francis Grose (1731-1791), John Brand (1744-1806), William John Thoms (1803-1885), Andrew Lang (1844-1912) and Sir Arthur Mitchell (1826-1909).

Northern Ireland. Within a Scottish context, the folklife branch of the ethnological tree has been best represented by Alexander Fenton, whose prolific publishing output of materials related primarily to Lowland Scotland and the Northern Isles, with particular emphasis on his native north-east, has done a great deal to place Scotland firmly on the European ethnological map. His studies are marked by a strong emphasis upon the daily and seasonal routines of the people of his chosen communities, rarely straying far from Erixon's tripartite model of investigation of 'time, place and social milieu'. Fenton's ethnographies are centred firstly upon the material world - vernacular building, food preparation and consumption, the tools and implements of the home and workplace - and are then fleshed out with the human involvement. This is what matches the *culture* to the *material*, and it is this symbiosis between man and environment which enables this form of ethnology to reach right into the heart of community life.

Fenton and his European colleagues have consistently advocated the use of as wide a range of source types as possible in any ethnological investigation, and as such have demonstrated the importance of a number of documentary forms of evidence which in the past have been neglected and ignored by scholars. Collectively labelled *ego documents*, these include personal diaries, farming day books, household, probate and work-related inventories and a host of other assorted personal records which can help to fill the many gaps left by the study of more centralised or official forms of documentation.<sup>4</sup> These scholars also tend to share a museum-based background, and as such are skilled in the interpretation of the 'three dimensional document' - the physical artefact. Although the term is rarely used, the investigative procedures followed by these scholars can best be labelled 'historical ethnography'.

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<sup>4</sup> An initiative by the European Ethnological Research Centre based at the National Museums of Scotland has led to the publication of a number of personal diaries and cash books from within Scotland - see Fenton 1994, Hewison 1996, and Pearson 1992 and 1994. An analytical critique of the usefulness of such sources is contained in Larsson and Myrdal (eds) 1995.

### *Historical Ethnography*

*Historical ethnography* is the term I have adopted for the methodology employed within this study, and indeed, for the *product* of this study, the dissertation itself. My interest in this concept stems from my early academic training, for in 1988 I graduated from the University of Edinburgh in the newly-initiated joint degree labelled *Scottish Ethnology and Scottish Historical Studies*. At that point my enthusiasm for this combination of subjects was not fuelled by any specific theoretical stance which saw advantages in this particular pairing, but rather by the complementary nature of the respective contents of each half of the degree. In short, I saw the history courses as providing a mental framework of Scotland's political and economic past which set the temporal context for my ethnological interest in the concepts of cultural tradition and the study of 'every day life'. Methodologically, the historians taught me the importance of adopting an objective and critical approach to the use of documentary sources, while the ethnologists (or folklorists as many still preferred) introduced me to the twin processes of fieldwork and collecting using the tape recorder as the principal tool of the trade. A year's introductory study of social anthropology also instilled in me a basic appreciation of the concept of participant observation as a central methodology used for the synchronic study of cultural forms and systems, and to ethnography as both product and process.

But while the anthropological tradition has been largely concerned with the 'intensive study of limited areas' within the temporal framework of the 'ethnographic present', my own attention was becoming increasingly drawn to the empirical study of the 'ethnographic past'. A more extensive reading within the literature of European ethnology began to convince me that such a focus was indeed central to this discipline, a point articulated by Bjarne Stoklund in his 1982 lecture delivered to the National Museum of Wales entitled *Folk Life Research: Between History and Anthropology*. For Stoklund, as for most Scandinavian scholars working in this field, the terms folklife and ethnology are



virtually synonymous and are positioned at the intersection of history and anthropology. Folklife, he argues, has close links to the field of study termed cultural history which became popular (for some) in late nineteenth century northern Europe. Practitioners of this particular genre, such as the influential Swiss scholar Jakob Burckhard and the Dane, Troels-Lund, unwittingly sparked a fierce debate as to the nature of history, and in particular who and what it should represent. To Dietrich Schäfer, political history was 'the proper field of history' (Stoklund 1982: 13) while discussion of the daily lives and spiritual observances of the masses was not a topic which he considered to be fit to grace the pages of any historical publication. Schäfer, in turn, was accused of 'favouring a deplorable scholarly compartmentalization' (ibid.: 14) which ignored the universality of both culture and history. Stoklund suggests that as far as 'history' is concerned, it was the political version which won through and dominated European historiography through the twentieth century, the cultural history branch of the humanities being taken up and championed by ethnologists. Mirroring the 'everyday' focus of the empirical anthropologists, ethnologists and folk life scholars brought the diachronic balance to the synchronicity of established ethnographic practice:

The diachronic study of a region or a community as a means of revealing the dynamics of cultural change is one important area where ethnology or folk life research should be able to contribute to the new interdisciplinary field of historical anthropology. I hope to have shown, however, that for several years ethnology has located its field of research just at the crossing point where history and anthropology today meet one another. (ibid.: 26)

Stoklund is by no means the only Scandinavian ethnologist to publicly consider the inter-relationships between ethnology and history. As Mats Lindqvist points out (1992), the historical orientation of ethnology has always been recognised as a cornerstone of the discipline, although few scholars from within have been prepared to wrestle with the theoretical and philosophical foundations of 'history'. What is history? What does it mean to apply an historical perspective?

On what grounds is a study defined as being historical or ahistorical? These are the questions Lindqvist implores us to consider in relation to ethnological investigation. Framed in another way, at what point does ethnography become historical ethnography?

In a brief but penetrating survey of ethnologists' attitudes to the historical challenge, Lindqvist highlights a range of approaches commonly followed. The 'contrapuntal' technique equates history with 'the past', a place which has the quality of 'otherness' and which can be studied and used 'to problematise the present and make it perceptible' (ibid.: 3-5). In this sense the past can be treated like any 'other' society. But how far back in time do we have to go before 'otherness' is found? Obviously, the answer depends on the particular focus of study, but the subjectivity of the problem appears to trouble Lindqvist, who is somewhat happier with the idea that history can also be defined as 'change':

When history stands in focus in terms of change, the distance of time becomes rather unimportant. It does not matter if it is a question of the 1880s or the 1980s, nor if the study spans twenty years or a few months. The most important thing is that *processes of change*, in some form, come into focus. (ibid.: 5, Lindqvist's emphasis)

Such a stance certainly captures the diachronic nature of most ethnological study, but Henrie Glassie, for one, would not be convinced:

Historians need tradition. For one thing, it would wean them from their obsession with rupture, free them from the need to segment time into trim periods, and enable them to face the massive fact of continuity ... Most of that which makes up life, and makes it endurable, is neglected in history because it cannot be gracefully assimilated in hearty narratives of violent change. (1995: 396)

Tradition is certainly not the antithesis of change, but Glassie's interpretation of the concept does tend to associate it more with continuity, a theoretical base which he argues sets the folklorist (and by association, the ethnologist) apart

from the historian.<sup>5</sup> For the ethnologist to perceive history only as 'change', then, would surely be to twist the discipline away from one of its central challenges, namely to examine the nature of cultural tradition against the framework of both change and continuity considered as a single paradigm.

It is for this reason that I am personally more drawn to Lindqvist's third conceptualisation of the historical problem within ethnology, 'history as experience'. This is a phenomenological position which treats history as a cultural construction and which emphasises personal and collective perceptions of the past as opposed to some imagined 'actual past'. It is an approach which is at once relativistic and subjective, placing it conceptually closer to most anthropological thinking than to the more objective grounding of (non post-modernist) historians. And yet, claims Lindqvist, those ethnologists favouring this approach to historical ethnography did not become 'anthropologists at home' because of their 'epistemological cross-breeding' which allowed them to find a harmony between relativistic and realist historical perspectives (1992: 9). In other words, while more concerned with the past than most anthropologists, absolute denial of objective 'historical fact' has never been common within the ethnological orientation. It is this balance which I have tried to achieve within the present investigation - my interpretative construction of the Perthshire rural past which I term historical ethnography.

While some ethnologists have been actively problematising 'history', so too in recent years have certain anthropologists who have begun to add historical depth to their ethnographic investigations. In his role as an historian of anthropology,

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<sup>5</sup> In a discussion session at the conclusion of an oral history conference held in Glasgow in 1995, a leading social historian remarked that nearly all the day's papers failed to provide a sense of 'change'. The possibility that this may have reflected the dominance of continuity over change within the particular themes addressed does not seem to have been considered by this particular scholar.

George Stocking asserts that this has been one of the most notable reversals in late twentieth century approaches within the discipline:

Not only are the problems and the data of anthropology once again seen to be essentially historical after a half-century of predominantly synchronic emphases, but anthropology itself is increasingly viewed as an historical phenomenon.' (Stocking 1993a: 5)

Cohn (1981), Davis (1981) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) all emphasise the potential advantages of an historical approach to ethnographic research and in the process have met one or two historians on this middle ground. One of the most respected is Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie who has forged a reputation as an ethnographic historian of distinction. His social history of a fourteenth century French village (1978) is frequently referred to as 'ethnography' in that his Montaillou peasants 'have been textualised in ways that characterise the speakers as articulate and insightful about the conditions of their own existence' (Rosaldo 1986: 79). In Lindqvist's terms, this is 'history as experience' (1992: 9) in this case reconstructed from a five hundred year old document in the form of an inquisition register. The work of Carlo Ginzburg too, relies heavily on ethnographic techniques to illuminate historical themes in steering a careful course between objectivity and subjectivity, frequently allowing the historical actors themselves to narrate their personal interpretations of their own past (Ginzburg 1980; 1990; 1992).

In a Scottish context, the historical perspective within ethnographic research has been adopted to varying degrees by both Cohen (1987) and Parman (1990). To Cohen, the past is a 'cultural resource' which is used by the people of Whalsay to underline awareness of difference and thus to construct the boundaries which he sees as being essential in the moulding of collective identity (1987: 133). Ethnographically, Cohen sees no difference between the past and the present in that 'both are subject to the vagaries of perception and interpretation' (ibid.). Susan Parman is more explicit in her treatment of history, signposting her study



of an island crofting community as 'a Historical Ethnography of a Celtic Village' (1990). Although she offers no explanation of this methodology, it is clear from her text that the historical ethnography label has been selected because of the dominance of the *idea* of the past within the crofting present. Her work setting is anthropologically conventional in the form of participant observation of a contemporary society: her ethnography is not historically situated in the same sense as that of Le Roy Ladurie. Rather, her approach clearly fits into Lindqvist's 'contrapuntal' category:

... history should be interpreted not as a recording of what "really" happened but as a cultural construction that is meaningful in the present to the people interpreting the past. ... This book explores many contexts in which the past is used to meet the needs of the present. (Parman: 1990: 13)

In spite of the chronological gulf, the form of historical ethnography I have employed within the present thesis is closer to that of Le Roy Ladurie than that found within the work of either Cohen or Parman. I have not been a participant observer. My stance has been etic rather than emic, my observational platform being placed on the temporal rather than spatial sidelines of the action. As an ethnographer, therefore, I concur with the thoughts of Clifford Geertz:

Understanding the form and pressure of ... natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke - or, as I have suggested, reading a poem - than it is like achieving communion. (1977: 49)

While Geertz is advocating an approach whereby 'the interpreter deliberately stands outside of and apart from the cultural production that is the object of interpretation' (Titon 1995: 438) I, as historical ethnographer, have no choice but to do this. My task has been to observe the past through the written and oral narratives of those who were participants within it.

### *Autoethnography*

As part of the re-assessment of ethnographic methodology and representation which has been taking place over the last decade or so, the term *autoethnography* has firmly established itself within anthropological discourse. Its meaning is fluid, various writers having utilised it to refer to a range of linked but distinct ethnographic situations. Reed-Danahay, in her survey of these uses (1997: 4-9), shows that the emphasis can be placed on either autobiography or ethnography. Some writers relate the term to 'anthropological autobiography' in which the 'anthropologist himself or herself is the autobiographical subject' (ibid.: 6), while others reserve the label for first-person ethnographic narratives told by 'an ordinary member of his or her society' rather than by a trained academic observer. To Pratt (1992), autoethnography is simply an ethnographic account of one's own culture irrespective of the status of the writer. Despite the shifts of emphasis, all these variations invoke issues of 'self' versus 'other' within ethnographic writing, and raise concerns regarding who has the right to speak and on behalf of whom (Reed-Danahay: 3).

Much of the research for this thesis has been centred upon members of my own extended family, whether through taped interviews or less formalised visits and chats. At one level, then, I can be placed firmly within the 'insider' category of ethnographers, for my fieldwork has also been situated geographically within my native county. And yet I have been very conscious throughout that my temporal distance from the way of life being discussed renders me an outsider. I know the names and landscape forms of the places mentioned and the faces of past generations from family albums; I have heard enough talk of the 'old days' to nod in recognition at names of tools, processes and foodstuffs, yet I have never driven a pair of horse, forked oats into a threshing mill, stood expectantly at the feeing fair waiting to be hired. I have never *felt* the life. In this respect, my 'access' problems reflect those of the historian rather than the anthropologist.

And yet I consider this study to be a form of autoethnography as it represents my own county, my own family and my own cultural roots (if not my own cultural experience). I am the narrator and this is my 'version' (Cohen 1987: 3) but my voice is not the only one contained within it. As an historical ethnography it relies heavily upon the oral testimony of 'the observed'.

### *Oral Testimony*

While the methodological approach adopted in this thesis owes much to the folklife pole of the ethnological spectrum, it has moved away from the models created by Fenton and his European counterparts in terms of its degree of emphasis placed upon oral sources. Certainly, the 'human document' has formed a part of the holistic approach of these scholars, but rarely is oral testimony given centre stage in either the research process or indeed in the final presentation of the evidence. In this study, however, it does play a pivotal role, and so it is to the theory and practice of the oral historian that I now turn.

As recently as 1991 a leading American scholar felt compelled to make the following observation in relation to the use of oral sources within historical enquiry:

The historical profession has not yet come to terms with the implications of this kind of material, despite the fact that it paves the way for a new social history which asks questions not about what happened, but about the historical processes of complex societies. Because at its best it posits answers in terms of a dialectal relationship between changing consciousness and social, political and economic movements, such materials deserve far more analysis and criticism than they have so far received. (Harris 1991: 3)

This plea for oral history to be treated more seriously as a valid academic methodology has been ongoing for several decades. Certainly, it has reached a stage whereby most historians give tacit approval to its use, and the once-frequent outright condemnations of any reliance at all on 'verbal hearsay' are now (publicly) rare. Nonetheless there certainly remains a strong core of sceptics

who constantly challenge the validity of oral source material largely on the basis of the fallibility of the human memory. This challenge has had a very positive influence, however, for it has forced oral historians to reconsider their theoretical approaches to their work and to engage in a healthy self-examination of their objectives and methods. Such reflexivity has helped to raise oral history up to new heights of achievement and the inter-disciplinary nature of this methodology has brought to it a mix of theoretical orientations which are beginning to serve it very well.<sup>6</sup>

Historians have not been alone in challenging the practice of recording witness testimony in an attempt to give a voice to the observed, for some anthropologists have vociferously denounced the use of oral recording in ethnographic fieldwork, considering it a poor substitute for the observation of 'speech in action'. Stephen Tylor is scathing of those who have moved towards this method of capturing actors' narratives:

... for even as they think to have returned to 'oral performance' or 'dialogue', in order that the native have a place in the text, they exercise total control over her discourse and steal the only thing she has left - her voice. (Tylor 1986: 128)

This is absurd. I cannot accept that I have exercised 'total control' over the narratives of those I have interviewed during this, or any other, research project. Indeed, I treat this as an insult to their intelligence and independence of thought and mind. I, as interviewer/narrator, must be aware of the power and privilege I enjoy through this dual role, of course, but Tylor, in his misguided attempt at post-modern ethnographic correctness, is denying the right of the observed to speak for themselves in favour of his right as observer to speak on their behalf. His articulated desire to redress the power imbalance between anthropologist

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<sup>6</sup> This interdisciplinarity is strongly reflected in Dunaway and Baum's 1996 collection of oral history essays. Dunaway's introduction (pp 7-22) discusses uses of oral history within such diverse fields as anthropology, ethnohistory, folklore, gerontology, legal studies, literary history, media studies, sociology and gender studies.



and native serves only to skew it yet further in his own favour. His claim that the point of discourse is 'not how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation' (ibid.: 128) has no basis in empirical reality. Indeed, the interpretative relationship between observer and observed is arguably more balanced when oral testimony is utilised within any form of ethnography for the resulting text is a composite interpretation reflecting the voices of both parties. If ethnography as product is to be considered 'fiction' (in the sense of something made or fashioned) as James Clifford suggests (1986: 6), then surely a construction based on the polyvocality derived from oral testimony provides for a more balanced 'version' (Cohen: 1987: 3), a more representative 'translation' (Asad 1986: 142).

One consequence of the reflexivity debate within the field of oral history has been a movement away from treating the use of oral testimony as simply a means of filling in factual gaps which have been left by reliance upon documentary sources. Oral sources can, of course, fulfil this role in many circumstances, particularly in cases where the topic of enquiry relates to the 'everyday', as is the case in the present study, but the influence of anthropologists, folklorists and ethnologists has brought a marked revisionist attitude which challenges the idea held by many that the oral interview, once transcribed, represents a source document which is no different in essence from any other. The oral history practitioner can never be detached from the results of the collecting process, for the interviewer plays such a central role in the creation of the transcript document that it cannot therefore be treated in the same manner as written evidence consulted passively in a library or archive.<sup>7</sup>

The use of orally sourced material adheres to Lindqvist's category of 'history as experience' (1992: 9) for the life-story or biographical approach provides a

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance Thompson 1978 and 1990 edition; Grele 1991; Lummis 1987.

projection of the world view of the individual informant. This 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach to the study of the past relies heavily on personal interpretations of that past: it is micro-history through the eyes and indeed memories of those whose lives helped to shape it. The emphasis, then, is upon the *experience* of living in a past context rather than on the wider political, economic and social framework which can in turn be provided through use of complementary sources of a documentary form. Oral testimony, therefore, is a vital building block of my historical ethnography.

Two sub-categories of oral sources have been used within this research. The first comprises existing archived audio tape recordings which have been deposited by other collectors. The archive of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh contains many thousands of hours of such recordings built up since the early 1950s, and represents an oral or aural collection without peer within Scotland. The subject matter contained within this archive is very diverse and relates to virtually every aspect of the cultural tradition of Scotland and indeed far beyond. This material has been fully catalogued and indexed, although only a small percentage has been transcribed. Containing factual information, opinions, prejudices and an assortment of other material which can form the basis of an analysis, the collection has proved very useful within the research process, but as a source it is passive rather than active. The original fieldworker would have had a particular agenda in mind while conducting each interview, and the main thrusts of his or her investigations would most likely have been at variance with one's present orientation. From a research point of view, this of course can be frustrating if not infuriating, as relevant themes may be mentioned tantalisingly briefly and questions which appear perfectly obvious within the context of one's own current research may well not have occurred to the interviewer at the time. Nonetheless, these recordings have proved of great use within this study, for patient searching has revealed much ethnographic material of high quality which has been able to inform this investigation.

Oral testimony is often of greatest benefit for detailed investigation when recorded specifically for a given project, as this allows the line of questioning to be crafted to reflect the specific interests of the researcher. Most of the oral sources used within this study fall within this category, and were recorded during fieldwork within Perthshire specifically for this thesis. These constitute a series of twenty semi-structured interviews with a variety of people whose life experiences rendered them suitable informants for the project, and many of them were members of my own extended family.<sup>8</sup> The semi-structured approach allows for a degree of flexibility to be introduced to the interview situation, and empowers the informant to signpost the themes which he or she considers significant, while enabling the researcher to pursue certain pre-prepared lines of enquiry which fit into the wider research framework.

All sources carry potential problems for the researcher, of course, and oral testimony must certainly be treated carefully and with a critical ear and mind. The human memory *is* fallible, and certainly in situations where informants are providing factual information about past events (rather than processes) it is always wise to try to corroborate these claims through other source types or indeed through the testimony of other witnesses. To Paul Thompson this is axiomatic, but in his classic (1978) defence of oral history he takes pains to remind us that 'facts' are only a small constituent part of the past. Experiences, emotions, prejudices, aspirations and a host of other factors are of course central to a fuller understanding of our history: oral testimony can certainly provide these in abundance. Nonetheless, oral history is at its most effective when used in conjunction with other sources, and so a range of documentary materials has been utilised within the current research.

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<sup>8</sup> The transcriptions of a selection of these interviews are included in full within Appendix Two.

## *Documentary Sources*

Most of the written material consulted during the research for this thesis is essentially narrative in form, for a heavy reliance has been placed upon qualitative data provided by witnesses to Perthshire farming life. Considerable use has been made of a number of nineteenth and early twentieth century Royal Commission Enquiries, for the *modus operandi* of most of these commissioners was to travel around the country in order to directly observe the problems which they were charged with investigating. Local witnesses were given a voice through interviews, although certainly those in positions of authority within local society - the clergy, heritors, occupiers and school teachers - tended to be chosen to represent the people's views rather than members of the more lowly majority, but some commissioners were admirably balanced in their choice of witness. Most were also intent on gaining a full understanding of the cultural, economic and social contexts within which their investigations were set, and it is for this reason that many of these reports have proved to be so rich for this research.

Local newspapers have also been invaluable and in addition to the data they contain on specific themes, provide an insight into the issues which were of concern to the reading public of the period. As remains the case to this day, however, even the local press tended to operate within specific political agendas: the *Perthshire Courier and General Advertiser* (from 1834 subtitled *The Farmers' Journal and Central Scottish Advertiser*) overtly supported the Tory cause from its inception in 1809, while the *Perthshire Advertiser and Strathmore Journal*, founded in 1829, claimed impartiality but in effect stood in direct political opposition to its rival. Read with care, though, the local press has contributed a great deal to the ethnographic study of several of the sub-themes addressed in this study, particularly those which constitute Part B.



A small selection of estate papers has also been consulted, and provides information on a range of themes within localised contexts. These are discussed in detail where appropriate within the main text, but once again the greatest emphasis has been placed upon the narrative elements contained within them, particularly the correspondence which often took place between absentee lairds and their estate management. The Delvine Papers in particular contain a large volume of such material and include the letters of staff down to the level of farm griever and even gardener, offering a splendid insider's view of estate life during a period of intense agricultural improvement. The Dalguise Muniments have also been closely consulted, and while less rich in such *ego document* material, have nonetheless been influential in aiding my understanding of the improvement process as witnessed upon a small independent estate lying in the shadow of the enormous lands of the house of Atholl.

The data collected during the research process has not been exclusively qualitative in form, however, for such sources as the decennial Census returns have provided a quantitative element where necessary. The problems inherent in their use are well-documented<sup>9</sup>, but essentially stem from inconsistencies of design which discourage attempts to trace diachronic trends and patterns. Again these problems are discussed as they arise within the text.

Finally, various other forms of written source have contributed to the research process. These include Kirk Session Minutes; Parish School Log Books; Birth, Death and Marriage Registers; the Old, New and Third Statistical Accounts for Scotland and Land Valuation Rolls.

A complete list of all sources consulted is provided in the Bibliography.

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Carter 1979: 99-100.

## Perthshire - General Background

### *Topography*

Physically - and by extension, agriculturally - Perthshire is a very interesting county, and at almost 1.5 million acres it certainly deserves its 'Big County' nickname<sup>10</sup>. That this vast area should encompass such a diversity of landscape forms, soil types and farming orientations is hardly surprising, especially given the contrasting nature of its two main geological foundations. Bisected by the Highland Boundary Fault line which enters the county near Callander in the south west and passes through Comrie and Dunkeld before exiting by Alyth in the north east, Perthshire is both Highland and Lowland in the literal, as well as cultural, sense of these terms.

Below the Fault, young rocks of the Lower Old Red Sandstone series support a deep and loamy soil which, once adequately drained, provides an agricultural base of significant worth. Above it, however, the older metamorphic schists and quartzites, combined with a heavier rainfall and higher altitudes, result in a terrain which is often altogether more hostile to the ambitious farmer. These generalisations should not be overemphasised, however, for while the impression one gets when travelling between the two areas is certainly one of striking physical contrast, both regions play host to significant local variation, resulting in a complex pattern of agricultural infrastructures which discourage thoughts of a simple Highland / Lowland dichotomy. The Lowland sandstone region, for instance, is interrupted spectacularly by the volcanic rock of the Ochil and Sidlaw ranges, the latter forming a rough and barren barrier between the Carse of Gowrie to the south and Strathmore to the north, two of the richest

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<sup>10</sup> Perthshire is the fourth largest of Scotland's counties (as they existed prior to the local government reorganisations of 1975), after Inverness-shire, Ross and Cromarty and Argyll. For the purposes of this thesis, the term *Perthshire* is understood as that county as it existed until 1975, when it was amalgamated with Kinross-shire to form Perth and Kinross district, a constituent part of Tayside Region. As part of this reorganisation, a large area in the south west of the county was transferred to Stirling district within Central Region, including the settlements of Dunblane, Callander, Doune, Aberfoyle, Lochearnhead, Killin, Crianlarich and Tyndrum. The 1996 local government restructure left the Perth and Kinross boundaries virtually unaltered from those established in 1975.

agricultural stretches in Scotland. Similarly, the thin, stony soils on the higher slopes of the Perthshire Grampian mass in the north of the county look down upon occasional stretches of high-value land in the upper reaches of the Tay, Earn and Tummel valleys. In some of these spots, drainage is poor and the soils remain waterlogged, but where drainage is better, arable production can be carried on with relative success. Conditions even vary considerably within individual glens, with soil fertility levels being governed by the specific nature of localised underlying glacial deposits of sand, gravel and clay.<sup>11</sup>

These factors have resulted in an eclectic approach to land use and agricultural production within Perthshire, particularly in the post-improvement period<sup>12</sup>. From the arable emphasis of the Carse of Gowrie, to the mixed arable, dairy and beef cattle production common throughout many parts of the county, to the sheep farming and deer forests of the marginal high ground in the north and west, farming in Perthshire can almost be viewed as a microcosm of the Scottish agricultural framework as a whole. This fact makes it all the more puzzling that Perthshire has been largely ignored by agricultural historians.<sup>13</sup>

### *Communications*

Natural drainage is served by the river Tay and its principal tributaries, the Tummel, Garry, Earn, Almond and Isla. The north-west to south-east orientation of most of these valleys results in a series of natural lateral communication channels across Perthshire, while travel through the county from south to north would be extremely difficult were it not for the Tay / Garry link which provides a narrow gateway to the rest of the Highlands. The intrusion of the Tay estuary into the south east of the county, navigable for light shipping as far as Perth,

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<sup>11</sup> A succinct but very detailed summary of Perthshire's geology and topography is included in S J Jones' introduction to the Perth and Kinross volume of the *Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, pp 15-23.

<sup>12</sup> These points are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two below.

<sup>13</sup> This point is discussed under the 'Perthshire Historiography' section below.

provides a largely landlocked region with a first class overseas trading channel, thus completing a natural communications system of considerable worth.

The Perthshire population has for long taken full advantage of these natural communication routes. The period covered by this study witnessed the development of a road and rail network which served to facilitate regular social and commercial intercourse within the county and indeed far beyond. Statute labour roads had begun to evolve at parish level in the early seventeenth century, paid for by the taxes of the freeholders and heritors and maintained by the sweat of the tenants and cottars, but by the late eighteenth century these were found to be inadequate for the needs of a county experiencing the first waves of large scale agricultural improvement. A sound communications infrastructure was of course a prerequisite for economic advancement, and so proprietors began to look towards a higher level of investment in the form of turnpike roads, financed through loans and a system of user tolls. Improved engineering methods also allowed for the construction of more reliable bridges capable of carrying the increased volume of wheeled traffic, with the efforts of Wade at Aberfeldy, Telford at Dunkeld and Rennie at Bridge of Earn being among the more important links in the internal road network.

Despite the lack of heavy industry within Perthshire, the development of a rail network which penetrated deep into the Highland area of the county was indeed led by a demand for rapid transportation of goods rather than people. Although they also acted as the catalyst for the emergence of tourism within Perthshire, the railways were built principally to serve the agricultural industry in the transportation of livestock and produce to the east coast ports and to the main domestic markets in the Central Belt. By 1849 a main artery line across the county from Dunblane to Forfar had been completed using the natural corridor of Strathmore, and by 1861 branch lines had been built to serve Alyth, Blairgowrie, Dunkeld, Methven, Crieff and Callander. A major feat of

engineering prowess was completed in 1863 with the opening of Joseph Mitchell's line over the Grampian land mass from Inverness to meet the existing track at Dunkeld, this in turn allowing Breadalbane to be opened up with the construction of a branch to Aberfeldy in 1865. In the west of the county, an extension to the Callander line reached Tyndrum by 1873 with a branch to Killin being opened in 1886. At a national level, Perth found itself to be a major junction for the lines of the main railway companies of Britain, a happy geographical accident which gave Perthshire's farmers and traders a direct link to the main population centres of Britain.

### *Population*

Relative to its physical size, the Perthshire population has always been fairly small, and with the exception of notable fluctuations in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, it remained remarkably stable throughout our period of study. As Table 0.1 reveals, the population in 1971 was only 1.2% higher than that of 1801. The peak was reached in 1831 during a period when rising birth rates combined with improved farming methods created an economic climate which was able to support a large rural population. This was followed, however, by a steady population decline over the next four decades as increasing industrialisation in the Central Belt acted as a magnet for the Perthshire workforce who began to abandon the fields in favour of the mills and factories. Since 1871, the population has enjoyed an extended period of uneventful stability, although the county certainly shared the emigration-led decline witnessed in many parts of the country during the 1920s and 30s as well as the 'baby boom' rise of the post World War Two period. These fluctuations are detailed in the table below.



**Table 0.1***Population of Perthshire 1801 - 1971, With Decennial Changes*

Year	Population	% Change	Year	Population	% Change
1801	125,583		1891	126,184	- 2.2
1811	134,390	+ 7.0	1901	123,283	- 2.3
1821	138,247	+ 2.9	1911	124,342	+ 0.9
1831	142,166	+ 2.8	1921	125,503	+ 0.9
1841	137,457	- 3.3	1931	120,793	- 3.8
1851	138,660	+ 0.9	1941	No Census	
1861	133,500	- 3.7	1951	128,029	+6.0
1871	127,768	- 4.3	1961	127,056	-0.8
1881	129,007	+ 1.0	1971	127,106	+0.04

In her analysis of the Perthshire population published as part of the introduction to the *Third Statistical Account*, Kershaw makes a number of interesting observations which serve to explain the peculiar demographic trends which are to be found there. For instance, the age distribution model altered significantly between 1871 and 1966, with the percentage of children within the population decreasing by over 10% (i.e. aged 15 and under) while the percentage of elderly people (defined as those over 65 years) almost doubled in the same period. These changes are significant when compared to Scotland as a whole, for in 1966 only 7.7% of the Perthshire population were aged under 5 years while 14.2% were aged over 65: the corresponding national figures were 9.2% and 11.2 % respectively. This accounts for the low rate of natural increase within Perthshire, given the low birth rate and higher death rate which are natural consequences of a top-heavy age distribution model.

Led by the work of the Chicago School of sociologists<sup>14</sup>, many twentieth century scholars have wrestled with the problems inherent in establishing a useful

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<sup>14</sup> The Chicago School, so-called because most of its members worked out of that city and published their work through the Chicago University Press, were a group of anthropologically-influenced sociologists or 'human ecologists' who conducted a number of city-based studies in order to try to understand the essential differences between rural and urban lifestyle modes. One of its most influential members was Louis Wirth, whose 1938 article 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' in the *American Journal of Sociology* Vol 44 set the groundwork for the development

definition of the concepts of 'urban' and 'rural'. Most agree that consideration of population size or density alone is wholly inadequate, although few leave either out of their equations entirely. Other factors which should be taken into account when categorising any given community, it is argued, include the specific nature of the principal modes of production and corresponding employment opportunities and the level and type of services readily available to the local people. According to Stewart, it is the use of space in relation to modes of production which should be considered when categorising settlements as urban or rural:

The functional distinction between urban and rural areas is the distinction between spatially extensive industries and occupations, mainly agriculture, and spatially intensive industries and occupations. (1958: 153)

Whatever combination of measuring criteria are used, Perthshire has always been essentially rural in nature, and indeed it continues to be so to this day. As far as settlement size is concerned, Perth itself is the only town to warrant 'large burgh' status with a population which has risen from 26,382 in 1871 to 41,196 in 1961. The other main population centres of the county are the dozen small burghs - Aberfeldy, Abernethy, Alyth, Auchterarder, Blairgowrie (incorporating Rattray from 1911), Callander, Coupar Angus, Crieff, Doune, Dunblane and Pitlochry. Of those, only two (Blairgowrie and Rattray, and Crieff) had achieved a population of 5000 by 1951. In 1871 only 39.8% of the Perthshire population lived in settlements of over 1000 people, a figure which had only risen to 52.8% by 1961 (Kershaw in TSA: 25).<sup>15</sup>

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of a body of urban sociological theory which rejects the existence of a simple urban / rural dichotomy and argues for the use of more complex theoretical models. Wirth sees the situation in terms of a rural - urban continuum, in which a range of factors must be taken into consideration, including modes of production and availability of services as well as size of population. These ideas were picked up and developed further by later scholars, including C T Stewart who places heavy emphasis on modes of production which, he argues, gives a settlement its characteristics and 'feel' (1958: 153).

<sup>15</sup> According to figures produced by Richard Rodger, Perthshire was the 13th most ruralised of the 33 Scottish counties in 1961. This was based on the proportion of the population living in settlements of 1000 or more (1996: 127).

The rural emphasis of Perthshire life is further highlighted by a survey of the principal industries which have existed there during our period. Stewart's ultimate 'spatially extensive' mode of production - agriculture - has certainly been central to the Perthshire economy throughout much of its history, and as the tables below clearly illustrate, it has remained so into the twentieth century. In 1911 agriculture was by far the largest source of employment of Perthshire males with over 10,000 or 28.4% of all males in employment earning their livelihood in farming. By this period, however, agriculture was less significant in terms of female employment, although it was still ranked fourth overall. By 1931 there was a greater variety of employment opportunities available as a result of increasing division of labour within the county, but this did not have any effect on the proportion of males who chose to remain engaged in agricultural production of some form: indeed the figure had increased slightly to 28.7%.

**Table 0.2**

*Males employed in principal industries, Perthshire 1911<sup>16</sup>*

Industry	Number of Males	%
Agriculture	10692	28.4
House building / decorating	2913	7.8
Food preparation & sale	2578	6.9
Railway service	2559	6.8
Domestic & institution	2492	6.6
All others	16368	43.5
Total	37602	100

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<sup>16</sup> Calculated from Census of Scotland 1911, Vol 1 Part 29 (cd.6097 - xxviii). 'Principal industries' are defined as those employing more than 2000 people. Only those of 14 years of age and over are included.



**Table 0.3***Females employed in principal industries, Perthshire 1911<sup>17</sup>*

Industry	Number of females	%
Domestic & institution	6085	34.4
Bleaching, dyeing & allied	1965	11.1
Tailoring & dressmaking	1317	7.4
Agriculture	1312	7.4
All others	7001	39.6
Total	17680	99.9

**Table 0.4***Distribution of males and females in principal occupations, Perthshire 1931*

Occupation	Males no.	Males %	Females no.	Females %	Both sexes %
Agricultural	11105	28.7	712	4.1	21
Personal service	1901	4.9	7521	43.0	16.7
Commercial	3663	9.4	2086	11.9	10.2
Transport & communication	4602	11.9	340	1.9	8.8
Other & undefined	3200	8.3	225	1.3	6.1
Clerks, etc.	1313	3.4	1816	10.4	5.6
Textile workers	1079	2.8	1762	10.1	5.1
Professional	1296	3.3	1425	8.2	4.8
Builders, bricklayers, etc.	2198	5.7	1	0.0	3.9
Metal workers	2007	5.2	19	0.1	3.6
Workers in wood & furniture	1528	3.9	28	0.2	2.8
Makers of textile goods	488	1.2	820	4.7	2.3
Other Occupations	4370	11.3	725	4.1	9.1
Total Occupied	38750	100	17480	100	100

### *Historiography*

Like its landscape, Perthshire's past is both colourful and bleak but seldom falls short of fascinating. As the 'crossroads of Scotland' its geographical centrality has brought to it more than its fair share of action, much of it of the blood-spilling kind. Its celebrated beauty has been a magnet for visitors of every hue; its standing stones have brought Pict hunters by the bus load, while its hills

<sup>17</sup> Calculated from *ibid.* For females, principal industries are defined as those employing more than 1000. Again, only those of at least 14 years are included.

support more rebel hideouts and its lochs more royal picnic spots than would seem either reasonable or indeed desirable.

All this of course is the stuff of 'heritage' - that selective quarrying of the past which is packaged up, sealed in tartan ribbon and sold as culture<sup>18</sup>. As a native of Pitlochry - the packaging centre *par excellence* - I am by no means unaware of the economic benefits which heritage-based tourism undoubtedly brings to the area and as a once-regular performer in 'Highland Nights' and summer vacation retailer of all things tartan, I have certainly played my own part in what some may refer to as the peddling of Caledonian kitsch. Whether one takes the view, as most locals do, that this tongue in cheek cultural self-parody is fine while it continues to put the dinner on the table, or whether one leans more towards the 'Scotch Myths' school<sup>19</sup>, as championed by Tom Nairn, which sees this 'tartan monster' as the true enemy of the Scottish people, there is no doubt that as far as Perthshire is concerned there *is* another, and very different story to be told. Its tellers have to scratch away the shiny 'postcard' surface to reveal the complex web of traditions, relationships, innovations, continuities, life stories, highs, lows and mundane realities of daily routines which serve to provide at least a glimpse of the way life has really been for the people of Perthshire over the centuries.

Unfortunately, with only a few noble exceptions, this story has remained largely untold. The explanation for this, I strongly suspect, can be found quite literally in

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<sup>18</sup> I do not mean to suggest that all that is produced under the 'heritage' banner is of poor quality, for many organisations and individuals who work within the heritage sphere have contributed to our knowledge of the past in a very positive sense. Nonetheless, recent decades have seen the emergence of a brand of heritage 'products' of a highly commercialised form in which quality has often been sacrificed for quantity. For further discussion of this theme see McCrone *et al* 1995.

<sup>19</sup> The Scotch Myths exhibition of 1981, set up by Murray and Barbara Grigor, collected together a wide range of materials which exemplified the kitsch face of Scottish culture - tartanry, 'balmorality', the kailyard - symbols of Scottishness which many cultural commentators viewed in a very negative light. Nairn, amongst others, has been unequivocal in his criticisms of these false cultural markers which he argues should be eradicated from Scottish life (Nairn 1977; Nairn 1988).

its very foundations, for Perthshire is both Highland and Lowland in all the connotations of these terms, but being partly both, it is neither wholly one nor the other, causing it to fall into a historiographical no-man's-land between the two. Excluded from official crofting status, it has attracted little interest from historians of the highlands whose excellent work over the last few decades has done a great deal to bring a much-needed sense of realism to our interpretations of the history and culture of those lands further north and west. Similarly, those whose principal research has taken the rural Lowlands as their focus also seem to view Perthshire as being largely outwith their ken or care: the 'clannit society' of the north-east, the extensive granary that is the Lothians, the dairies and Levellers of the south-west are all seen to be more deserving of academic attention than 'the Big County'.

The exceptions are notable nonetheless and several authors and collectors have indeed shown the way forward. The district of Atholl, for instance, has certainly been well served of late, largely through the efforts of historian Leah Leneman and local enthusiast John Kerr. Leneman's splendid 1986 contribution *Living in Atholl* provides a focused and detailed insight into the social lives of those whose world was the massive Atholl estates during the century to 1785. A meticulous trawl through the virtually untapped splendours of the estate archives held in Blair Castle has allowed Leneman to bring to life the hidden history of the local people. This is a history which of course was flavoured by the political struggles surrounding the Stewart cause, the local consequences of which were admittedly considerable<sup>20</sup>, but it is also a history of the 'every-day': of social hierarchies, of wadsetts and joint-tenancies, of agricultural improvements, of neighbour disputes, of colourful characters, of crime and punishment, popular piety and paternity suits.

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<sup>20</sup> Leneman's final chapter, *The Effects of the Jacobite Risings* (215-241) shows that for tenants, cottars and servants alike, the price of war was often very high indeed, many paying with their lives.

John Kerr too has done a great deal to improve the standards of local historical enquiry and presentation through his energetic enthusiasm for uncovering the truths of the more recent Atholl past. The impressive list of his publications cited in the bibliography of this thesis only tells part of his story, however, as for the past decade or so he has also delivered the fruits of his enquiries to locals and visitors alike in his regular talks, exhibitions and slide-shows in and around Atholl and indeed far beyond. His themes are eclectic and occasionally esoteric, but achieve that balance between popularity and scholarly accountability that is all too rare in Perthshire historiography.

In neighbouring Breadalbane, there is rather a paucity of work of this kind although the story is by no means wholly gloomy. McArthur's 1936 analysis of the *Survey of Lochtayside* of 1769 which had been commissioned by the Earl of Breadalbane as a prelude to his estate improvement programme, reveals much of the minutiae of the material culture and social organisation of north-west Perthshire at that time, while James Stewart's involved examination of four centuries of settlement history of the western fringes of the county is also worthy of note (1990). Local shoemaker Alexander Stewart's history of Fortingall parish (1928) contains much of value, but deals largely with the local landed elite as opposed to the life experience of the more lowly majority of which he himself formed a part. Much the same is true of William Gillies's *In Famed Breadalbane* (1938) which belongs essentially to the antiquarian tradition of enquiry and as such is short on penetrative social analysis and long on genealogical narrative. As a work of this genre, though, it is unsurpassed within the Perthshire context, for this is a scholarly treatment of high quality and should certainly be viewed as the first port of call for a reliable and highly detailed biographical account of the Breadalbane aristocracy.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Perthshire shared in the widespread desire of many of Scotland's clergy to compose and publish histories



of their respective parishes. Keen to emulate the achievements of their predecessors whose labours had made such a success of the Old and New Statistical Accounts, highly motivated ministers in several parts of the county produced lengthy and often verbose local histories. Indeed many of these works owed much to Sir John Sinclair's original vision, although grouped together, these histories repeat many of the more negative features of the Statistical Accounts whilst unfortunately failing to reproduce much of the positive. The main strength of both the OSA and NSA was geographical comprehensiveness, and while the particular hobbies and interests of their authors often received more space than the major issues of local society, the questionnaire-based approach employed by Sinclair at least brought some degree of common structure which lends support to comparative analysis. The later Perthshire local histories, however, were independent initiatives with little sense of common purpose and as such, their pages tended to be filled with esoteric ramblings. That said, patience can certainly bring the reader rewards, and the likes of Macara's 1881 study of Crieff, Meldrum's 1926 account of life in nearby Forteviot, Forrester's 1944 history of Logiealmond and Mackie's *Annals of Arngask* of 1958 all share a liveliness and enthusiasm which certainly help to create a 'feel' for local tradition and a solid sense of place.

One more recent specialist study based within Perthshire is deserving of higher praise. Albert Bil's seminal (1990) investigation of the shieling tradition of Scotland centres upon the Highland area of the county and is admirable in the first instance for the sheer scale of the source material meticulously consulted and analysed for its preparation. This is by no means its only strength, however, for Bil provides a convincing demonstration of the importance of the transhumance tradition to Scottish upland agriculture, and indeed the background material included by way of context gives a significant insight into the social and political organisation of this area in the period between 1600 and 1840. Emphasising the territorial importance of shielings, particularly in their

secondary role as boundary markers, Bil argues that the people of north and west Perthshire viewed the annual trip to the shielings as a tradition which was a central icon of their sense of community, and while dispelling the idea that the practice remained impervious to forces of change throughout its lifetime, concedes that the concept of custom was of central importance to its survival into the nineteenth century.

The more creative manifestations of Perthshire cultural tradition have been relatively well served by scholars, for both oral narrative and Scots song within the county have attracted genuine interest amongst folklorists and collectors from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Once again Atholl boasts one of the finest of these collections in the form of the Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray manuscript housed in the School of Scottish Studies which consists of 240 tales taken down between February and November 1891 from the tenants and cottars of the Atholl estates and surrounding districts. Written in Gaelic and transcribed in the words of the informants themselves, this collection (currently being translated into English and edited in preparation for long overdue publication) represents the fruits of a labour of love undertaken by the youngest daughter of the 7th Duke of Atholl. Lady Evelyn, like her father a fluent Gaelic speaker, showed considerably more interest in the lives and traditions of the Atholl people than she did in those of her aristocratic peers, and from an early age it became quite apparent that she had no intentions of conforming to the lifestyle of the society into which she was born. Forced by her family into an existence of exile overseas, her life brought her little happiness, but her cultural legacy in the shape of her oral narrative collection is immense. Rescued during the dying throes of the Gaelic language in Perthshire, it demonstrates the richness of the genuine oral tradition of such a concentrated area and the easy manner in which anecdotes of local heroes, historical legends, fairy lore and witchcraft sat happily



side by side with international wonder tales or märchen on the tongues of the people of Atholl.<sup>21</sup>

Further south and east, the numerous base camps of families of cairds, travellers or tinkers have proved most rewarding hunting grounds for the folklorists and ethnologists of more recent years. In the infancy of the School of Scottish Studies, Hamish Henderson recorded hundreds of hours' worth of interviews and ceilidhs around Dunkeld and Blairgowrie, discovering strong survivals of a rich and vibrant oral culture which to this day remains a magnet for scholars throughout the western world. Henderson's discovery of genuine tradition bearers whose ballads and stories had survived and indeed developed through a process of oral transmission for centuries, sowed the seeds of the entire folk revival of the 1950s and 60s and the reputation of the folk dynasty of the Stewarts of Blair and the storyteller Willie MacPhee has served to place Perthshire firmly on the map of international folklore scholarship. Henderson's lead has been followed by several others, including Sheila Douglas whose work on both the song and narrative traditions of the Perthshire travellers has, in my experience, gone some way toward educating the local populace as to the worth of this community and indeed toward countering the prejudices to which these travellers have for long been subjected.

Perthshire, then, is by no means completely devoid of high quality historically oriented academic works, but when compared to most other regions within Scotland its academic bibliography is disappointingly sparse. Much more requires to be done if the 'shortbread tin' caricature of Perthshire's heritage is to be finally dissolved in favour of a more analytical and penetrative reconstruction of its past.

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<sup>21</sup> For a slim but most revealing biography of Lady Evelyn see Robertson and Young 1996.

## Structure of the Thesis

The main body of this work is divided into two parts: Part A (Chapters One, Two and Three) deals with the theme of 'Farm and Family', while Part B (a Prologue plus Chapters Four, Five and Six) examines the concept of neighbourhood through the specific theme of non-waged communal labour systems. The present Introduction, and a final concluding section, complete the main text of the thesis. Appendix One presents a glossary of terms relating to communal labour traditions, while Appendix Two contains full transcriptions of a selection of the recorded interviews which have been most influential in the construction of this work. Finally, a full bibliography is included.

Chapter One outlines the manifestations of the agricultural improvement process within the Perthshire context, and includes a short case study of one medium-sized estate situated on the Tay a few miles to the south of the Highland boundary. Chapter Two deals with the importance of family labour to the post-improvement agricultural infrastructure of the county, concentrating on qualitative accounts of the family *experience* of the farming life mode using data derived from both oral and written sources. A brief case study of my own extended family's experiences is included in order to provide a closely focused context to the wider patterns of Perthshire social organisation. Part A concludes with Chapter Three which examines the 'temporary family' of the farm bothy. The origins and distribution of the Perthshire bothy system are traced, and an ethnographic account of bothy life is provided, with particularly close attention being paid to the overt and underlying factors which combined to create a distinctive bothy sub-culture.

The prologue to Part B creates an initial theoretical framework relating to the concept of non-waged communal labour, based on the empirically-led thinking of several anthropologists and sociologists who have investigated this phenomenon in a variety of contexts. The purpose of this section is to set the

backdrop against which the Perthshire evidence for the existence, development and dynamics of this form of labour can be viewed. Chapters Four and Five constitute an historically-situated ethnography of the two manifestations of this within the county, labelled *Exchange Labour* (Chapter Four) and *Charity Labour* (Chapter Five). Chapter Six presents a more focused analytical discussion of the Perthshire findings, relating this material to international parallels set against a framework of recent thought within the field of cooperation theory.

### *Audio Illustrations*

An edited Compact Disc accompanies the text of this thesis. This provides ready access to the 'voices' of a number of my principal informants, and contains material from a small sample selection of the fieldwork recordings quoted within the text. The relevant track references are cited within the main text at the beginning of the corresponding quotation.

### *Visual Illustrations*

Photographs sourced from the Scottish Life Archive of the National Museums of Scotland, from the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and from my own family collection have been integrated into the body of the thesis by way of illustration.

# **PART A**

## **FARM AND FAMILY**

# CHAPTER ONE

## PERTHSHIRE AGRICULTURE IMPROVED

The purpose of this chapter is to set the contextual framework for the rest of the thesis by outlining the agricultural changes which took place within Perthshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To do full justice to this theme would demand much more space than is available here, and so the treatment is necessarily selective. Most attention has been paid to the eighteenth century in order to identify the genesis of the farming infrastructure which was to prevail within the county through to the 1950s. A detailed discussion of the agricultural trends and patterns which evolved in Perthshire through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is provided in Catto (1979) and so is not repeated here.

### **‘Agricultural Improvement’ - the Scottish Background.<sup>22</sup>**

Terms such as ‘The Agricultural Revolution’ and ‘The Agricultural Improvements’, or simply, ‘The Improvements’ are normally used to refer to the advances in farming infrastructure and method which, within a Scottish context, swept through the country from south to north from the third quarter of the eighteenth century (Handley 1963; Symon 1959). As Fenton points out, however, the roots of change can be traced back to the seventeenth century with the introduction of the practice of liming the outfield, particularly for oat cultivation, and towards the end of that century, the beginnings of the enclosing of fields, an innovation which seems to have been first introduced in Galloway

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<sup>22</sup> Solid accounts of the history of the Agricultural Improvements in Scotland already exist (Devine 1996; Handley 1963; Symon 1959; Whyte 1979), and so the intention here is simply to provide a brief general reminder of the backdrop against which the material relating specifically to Perthshire can be viewed.

based on long-standing English practice (Fenton 1976: 14).<sup>23</sup> Lime had been known as a means of counteracting acidity in soil since the Roman period, and had been a feature of certain advanced European agricultural systems since the Middle Ages. Scotland, however, cannot be considered as having been within this 'advanced' category, and it was not until the seventeenth century that the use of lime as a fertiliser began to be adopted to any significant degree. Even then, its use was largely confined to those areas which had ready access to limestone deposits and outcrops: it was too expensive to transport it more than a few miles and was therefore outwith the means of all but the wealthiest of farmers (Whyte 1979: 199; Symon 1959: 113).

Nonetheless, the limited introduction of liming and the enclosing tendencies shown in the south-west represented the first significant divergence in agricultural production patterns within Scotland since the evolution of the runrig system, which had been fully established by the fifteenth century and possibly as early as the twelfth (Lynch 1991: 61; Dodgshon 1981). The principal organisational features of runrig were that production was centred around the *toun* (or *baile* in the Gaidhealtachd), a nucleated settlement of dwellings and outbuildings inhabited by a group of tenants and sub-tenants<sup>24</sup>. Arable production was concentrated on two categories of cultivated land: *infield*, which was continuously cropped and manured in a very intensive way, and *outfield*, less than half of which was cropped each year with the remainder being used as pasture. Marking the boundaries of each *toun* or community was a wall of rough

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<sup>23</sup> In the late seventeenth century, enclosures were associated with livestock rather than arable production. Galloway enjoyed a healthy cattle trade with England and several lairds saw the benefits of enclosed fields as grazing parks for fattening stock. Fenton (1976: 14-15) shows that the practice of enclosure tended to filter down through the social ranks from lairds' holdings to the main farms on large estates, and finally, well into the eighteenth century, tenants' holdings began to be enclosed and divided into fields.

<sup>24</sup> Some of the larger *touns* would also have housed one or two artisans such as smiths, millers, etc.



stone or turf, beyond which lay the communal rough grazings, summer pastures or shielings, and source of turf for fuel and building materials.

The cultivated land was in the form of unenclosed rigs or ridges - long sweeping raised beds of soil up to thirty-six feet in width and separated by ditches. Most pre-eighteenth century rigs were slightly curved or serpentine in shape, a feature which was probably designed to ease the turning of the unwieldy twelve-ox plough teams which proliferated in many parts of Scotland.<sup>25</sup> These rigs and ditches were often formed on gentle slopes as opposed to flat plains in order to facilitate basic drainage, and each tenant's rigs were not contiguous but were dotted around the infield and outfield in an attempt to share out the best and poorest land fairly. To this end, the rigs were also regularly swapped between tenants in a further attempt to achieve some degree of parity.

This arrangement resulted in a communal approach to the work of the *fermtoun* although few surviving sources provide much detail on the day to day workings of these pre-improvement farms within Scotland.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, it seems to have been common practice for each tenant to contribute an ox or two to a communal plough team, and for this team to work the rigs of each member in turn (Symon 1959: 17). While such cooperation may well have served to foster a sense of community within the *fermtouns*, it would be wrong to view this phenomenon as being in some way representative of a rural utopia in which every individual acted for the overall good of the settlement. Many advocates of improvement

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<sup>25</sup> For an in-depth analysis of plough team variations see JA Watson *The Scottish Plough Team in History* in *The Scottish Journal of Agriculture* Vol XIV, no. 2. The curved form of the rigs was often the focal point for much negative comment by later advocates of improvement. One OSA author remarked, 'The farmer, if he may be called so, had his crooked ridges every where warped through the crooked ridges of his neighbour' (OSA Vol XII: 236).

<sup>26</sup> One of the most convincing arguments in favour of the existence of a strong communal spirit within the *fermtouns* is put forward by David Buchan in *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972 and 1997). Referring to the north east of Scotland and drawing heavily on the Monymusk Papers, Buchan argues that the communal emphasis within the patterns of social organisation common in the area in the pre-improvement period created the ideal climate for the development of a strong ballad tradition.

were highly critical of the communal nature of farm production and saw it as being a major barrier standing in the way of change for the better. Writing in 1783, for instance, the Earl of Breadalbane's chamberlain on the Argyll portion of his estates warned of the negative impact of the run rig system which continued to operate there at that time:

Many farms have eight tenants ... These eight tenants labour the farm and carry on all their other works together. First they plow the whole land, then they divide every field or spot of ground which they judge to be of equal quality into eight parts or shares and cast lots for what each is to occupy for that crop. After this each sows his own share and reaps it again in harvest and so they go on year after year. If men's dispositions and tempers in the same situation of life were nearly equal and if they considered their neighbours' good at all times as nearly connected with their own, such a method of carrying on the works of a farm might do very well, but the contrary is the fatal truth and verified in a strong degree amongst these people. For often more time is spent in contending not only what work is first to be done but also the manner in which it is to be done than would actually carry the double into execution, and that none may do less than his neighbour, all go to a piece of work which perhaps might be done by one. By this much time is lost and contentions often arise to a disagreeable and troublesome height. (Breadalbane Estate Papers, quoted in *Survey of Lochtayside 1769*<sup>27</sup>: liv-lv)

It would be surprising if many other tasks were not also carried out using mutual cooperation amongst the joint tenants, for as will be discussed in Part B of this thesis, this was certainly an important feature of post-improvement agriculture within Scotland. However, these *fermtouns* were not cooperatives in the strict sense of the term, for while mutual assistance may well have been strong and indeed necessary, each tenant was usually responsible for his own rigs and for the payment of his own share of the rent: the means may have shown cooperative tendencies but the end did not.

The story of agricultural improvement in Scotland is essentially the story of the breaking up and dissolving of this runrig system and its replacement by the

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<sup>27</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Survey*.

patterns of agriculture we see all around us today. It is the story of the individualisation of holdings by phasing out joint- and multiple-tenancies; of the flattening of rigs and the creation and enclosing of rectangular fields; of the introduction of new crops and more advanced implementation, and of the improvement of the soil through drainage, liming, fallowing and crop rotation. By extension, it is also the story of regional specialisation of agricultural production as more advanced scientific knowledge led to a heightened realisation that certain terrains were more suited to certain modes of production and less so to others. A further consequence was the emergence of a new professional and social hierarchy amongst the farming fraternity which was particularly marked in the Lowland areas, for the creation of single tenancies left a deep residue of landless labourers within the countryside. Such a hierarchy had always existed in certain respects, as shall be shown in relation to Perthshire below, but the improvements magnified these, in many cases changing social gaps into gulfs and creating a farmer / labourer, or employer / employee divide which has largely survived intact to this day.

Up until the final few decades of the eighteenth century much of the agricultural improvement which was taking shape in Scotland was confined to the home farms of the more ambitious and wealthy members of the aristocracy, for the capital investment required was great and the short term financial return was negligible. Thus, despite much debate on the subject amongst groups such as the Edinburgh-based *The Honourable the Society of Improvers* founded in 1723, and widespread agreement that change was indeed necessary, for much of the century improvement may well have been in the air, but it was not always manifest on the ground. Nonetheless, the climate for change was certainly being created from fairly early in the eighteenth century, and arguably even before that, with a select band of notable individuals leading the way. Most agricultural

historians have suggested<sup>28</sup> that initial impetus came from the south of England where improvements were already well underway: several Scots nobles, by now regularly moving in English social circles as parliamentary representatives, were impressed by the developments they witnessed and set out to emulate these advancements back home on their own estates, and in fits of evangelical agricultural proselytising, urged others to do likewise.<sup>29</sup> This took the form of the publication of a number of books on correct methods of husbandry and the founding of a host of local agricultural societies based closely on the ideas and structure of the aforementioned Edinburgh Society of Improvers.<sup>30</sup>

The agricultural improvements within Scotland, then, were certainly tangible but nonetheless sporadic during the first half of the eighteenth century. Political uncertainty in the specific shape of Jacobitism did nothing to help create the necessary climate of stability which would have encouraged significant financial investment, and even in the relative peace of the two decades following Culloden, agricultural change was largely cosmetic. By the 1770s, however, more deep-rooted and practical developments were beginning to be implemented and by time of the publication of Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Accounts* in the final decade of the century there were very few parishes in Scotland where change of some kind was not ongoing.

In recent years, certain revisionist scholars have been re-examining the process of agricultural improvement in Scotland, and have begun to question the 'darkness and the dawn' interpretation of Scottish rural history which, it is claimed, has been tainted by the pro-unionist sympathies of generations of our leading historians. Beveridge and Turnbull (1989) have placed themselves at

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<sup>28</sup> See the Beveridge and Turnbull discussion below.

<sup>29</sup> These individuals include Lord Kames, Lord Belhaven, Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, Grant of Monymusk, Barclay of Urie, Thomas Hamilton the sixth Earl of Haddington, Cockburn of Ormiston, Sir John Sinclair and several others.

<sup>30</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography of these publications set out in chronological form, see Symon 1959.



centre stage in this debate, challenging the conclusions of several influential scholars such as T.C Smout, T.B Franklin, J.E Handley and J.A Symon, all of whom, it is claimed, portray pre-1707 Scotland as a poverty-stricken backwater peopled by 'ignorant and uniformly lazy' peasants (ibid.: 37). Theirs, it is argued, is an 'inferiorist' interpretation of our history. Their common discourse implies that pre-eighteenth century Scotland was in darkness, with the dawn being provided by the Treaty of Union which created the climate for the revolutionary changes of the coming century and a half.

Beveridge and Turnbull's analysis is certainly convincing up to a point, and they succeed in providing a good deal of evidence gleaned from the works of those scholars mentioned above which does indeed reveal that to varying degrees they all imply that agricultural and social change in late eighteenth century Scotland was nothing short of revolutionary, with the Union being unanimously viewed as the catalyst. Beveridge and Turnbull prefer the stance taken by Ian Whyte, perhaps unsurprisingly, as it fits neatly into their own anti-unionist agenda. Whyte, they conclude, is much nearer the truth when he asserts

seventeenth century Scottish agriculture was not as primitive and unchanging as had been believed. It even seemed that there might be a need to modify the traditional sharp contrast between the 'Agricultural Revolution' and the era of benighted ignorance which had supposedly preceded it. (ibid.: 45, from Whyte 1979: 2)

Whyte concludes that there was much of value in the pre- 'improvement' agricultural systems of Scotland and that our rural historiography has relied too much on ethnocentric accounts left by southern visitors who saw a situation with which they were unfamiliar and which they therefore dismissed as backward.<sup>31</sup> This is a point with which Beveridge and Turnbull wholeheartedly agree. Furthermore, they emphasise Whyte's contention that a good deal of improvement was already underway in Scotland during the seventeenth century

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<sup>31</sup> Whyte laments the legacy of such collections as Hume Brown's *Early Travellers in Scotland* of 1891, which, he asserts, has been overly influential in shaping our ideas of Scotland's past.

and that the dawn was beginning to break long before 1707, a point corroborated by Fenton in an article in which he refers to Scottish agricultural improvement as an 'Indigenous Development' (Fenton 1974: 90).<sup>32</sup>

While it may be wise to avoid becoming drawn too far into these arguments at this stage, Beveridge and Turnbull have at least reminded us that conventional wisdom needs to be challenged. Was agricultural change in eighteenth century Scotland revolutionary or evolutionary? To fully address this question is outwith the scope of this study, but the point shall be borne in mind in the analysis of the Perthshire agricultural improvements below.<sup>33</sup>

### **Perthshire Improvement**

In common with much of Scotland, the final third of the eighteenth century must be seen as the beginning of the *main* period of improvement in Perthshire agriculture. Certainly, small steps had been taken in this direction by certain individuals and estates within the county earlier in the century,<sup>34</sup> but these labours were initially slow to bear fruit for a variety of reasons, as will be explained below. By the final three decades of the century, however, change was well under way in many of the county's parishes and the first stirrings of action were being witnessed in the remainder.

The rest of this chapter will provide a general overview of these changes and developments, in both the Lowland and Highland regions of the county. In order

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<sup>32</sup> This is a common theme in Fenton's work. See also, for example, Fenton 1995. In this article which looks at the 'greening' of the Scottish countryside, he shows that there was much going on by way of agricultural improvement in Scotland during the 17th century.

<sup>33</sup> Fenton, for one, is in no doubt regarding the answer to this question: 'The period of agricultural improvement was evolutionary rather than revolutionary, though it has often been regarded as a revolution in retrospect' (Fenton 1995: 219)

<sup>34</sup> Lord Kames' drainage schemes at Blair Drummond, for instance, are often interpreted as a milestone in Scottish agricultural advancement.



to provide an initial point of focus, however, a short localised case study will be presented of one medium-sized estate situated just to the South of the Highland Boundary near Dunkeld.

### *A Perthshire Estate Improved - The Case of Delvine*

A detailed insight into the improvement process at work upon a Lowland Perthshire estate can be gleaned through examination of the Delvine Manuscripts, part of the Lauriston Castle collection held within the National Library of Scotland. Delvine, situated on the East banks of the Tay midway between Dunkeld to the north and Perth to the south, was held by the Mackenzies, a family of eminent Edinburgh lawyers whose Perthshire connections began with John Mackenzie, Advocate and Principal Clerk of Session (formerly of Crammond) who died in 1731, and who passed the estates on to his son Alexander, Principal Clerk of Session who died a short time later in 1737. Most of the papers, however, relate to the period of ownership of his successor, his brother John Mackenzie, WS and Deputy Keeper of the Signet who was responsible for most of the improvements despite spending much of his time at work in Edinburgh. On his death in 1778, the lands passed to his widow and Alexander's grandson, Sir Alexander Muir Mackenzie, 1st Bart, WS who died in 1835.

The Delvine Manuscripts constitute an immense collection of correspondence, accounts and general papers relating to the running of this Lowland Perthshire estate largely during the second half of the eighteenth century. The records shed much light on contemporary aspirations and attitudes towards estate life in general and agricultural improvement in particular. As we might expect, we tend to hear mainly from the upper levels of the estate hierarchy, and the lairds' own correspondence is certainly voluminous and rich in content, but so too is that of several of their factors, notably the Rev. James Hill whose correspondence spans

the period from the early 1750s to the early 1770s and his successor, Edmund Ferguson, who continued in his post until 1791. This analysis will concentrate on the later period of the ownership of John Mackenzie, laird from 1737 until 1778.

The second half of the 18th century witnessed major attempts towards agricultural and social improvement on the Delvine estates. Indeed, the extent to which farming improvement went hand in hand with positive social change of a more general nature is clearly underlined in these documents: the correspondence of Ferguson to his master in Edinburgh, for example, contains impressive detailed weekly updates of the progress of improvements of all kinds and is not confined by any means to talk of enclosures, drainage, and cropping, frequent as such references are. The factor also talks proudly and enthusiastically of road building, tree planting, roof mending, garden designing and house building as well as a whole host of other activities in the improving spirit shared by much of the Lowlands at this time.

The Delvine management, particularly under Edmund Ferguson who was factor during a period of intense improvement on the estate, obviously set about their tasks with great enthusiasm and zeal. The correspondence reveals much about their thoughts, hopes, aspirations and frustrations. A determined and firm hand - perhaps even approaching ruthlessness - was shown to tenants who were seen to be failing in their holdings and ignoring the terms of their tack agreements, all of which were designed with enforced improvement very much in mind. Evictions were by no means uncommon, although the management do appear to have been meticulous in ensuring that all such actions were undertaken with due warning having been given and legally documented, and to be fair, after every chance was given to wayward tenants who were either in serious arrears of rent or else whose presence was deemed not to be conducive to the overall improvement of the estates.

Indeed, the papers reveal that a strong sense of estate identity was created under the Mackenzie ownership and reflected in the approach of the factors, although to what extent this was shared by those further down the social ladder remains unclear. The impression one gets from Edmund Ferguson's correspondence in particular is that he liked to think of the inhabitants of the estates as being one big happy family, although the happiness was patently not always shared by all. Never is an impression created of a *laissez-faire* attitude having prevailed: Ferguson and the other factors before and after him kept a very close eye on the work of all employed on the estate and all the tenant farmers too. Help in the form of manpower and implementation was readily provided to tenants in difficulties if they could be spared by the home farm, for instance, and a marked paternalist attitude was displayed within the upper ranks of the estate management. On the death of an employee, for example, the burial arrangements were usually organised by the factor, and Ferguson's correspondence reveals a genuine concern for the dependants of the deceased. The costs of burial were also borne by the estate:

The accounts of William Gow's death on Sunday evening would be no surprise to you: nature was quite exhausted and he died very easy. He was interred agreeable to your directions, at your expense. (Ferguson to John Mackenzie, 20th July 1777, NLS Ms 1272:144)

The Delvine estate was of significant size and undoubtedly acted as the main focal point for the communities in the Caputh and Spittalfield area situated on the East banks of the river Tay. The estate comprised around two thousand acres, a formidable presence in a localised context although perhaps appearing fairly insignificant when viewed against the massive neighbouring Atholl estates to the north.

In 1759, before improvement began in earnest, the rentals for Delvine show that there were twenty-four farm units on the estate supporting a total of sixty-five tenants. At this period, the runrig system involving joint- and multiple- tenancies

was still largely in operation, although there was great variation in the numbers of joint tenants upon these farms. Nine of them were single tenancies, eight were jointly tenanted by two named people, one had four tenants, four had five, one had six and one had ten (NLS Ms 1293:254). This shows a similar pattern to the nearby Dalguise Estate a few miles to the north where examples can be found of single-tenanted farms as well as instances of two, three, four and six people jointly tenancing (SRO GD38/1), but has a significantly larger proportion of single tenancies than was the case even some ten years later on Lochtayside in Breadalbane, where less than 10% of the farms were being worked by individual tenants (*Survey*). As the century progressed, on Delvine more and more of the joint and multiple tenancies were divided up amongst the tenants so that all were able to work their own lands as individuals. Occasional entries in account books provide a glimpse of this process in operation, as reference is made to payments to land surveyors commissioned to advise on the best method of division. An entry dated 23 December 1783 provides one example:

Paid to John Troup, Land Surveyor at Marle, for his trouble in surveying & dividing the farm of Inchtuthill among the five Tenants and making a plan of the same & for surveying & dividing the 6 pendicles of Cassie among the possessors thereof, £5. (NLS Ms 1516:35)

By 1788 this process was complete and none of the farms continued to be worked by more than a single tenant. (NLS Ms 1510)

While the rentals give no indication as to the extent to which these twenty-four farms also supported cottars, they certainly did exist, for some years later we find Ferguson actively discouraging the tenants from taking cottars on, who it would seem were viewed as being major obstacles standing in the way of estate progress. In 1787, one tenant, Andrew Bisset, was incurring the factor's wrath for failing to adhere to the conditions of his lease. The list of complaints was long, but chief among them was the fact that he continued to keep

a swarm of cottars and pendiclers on his said farm who have destroyed the grass and arable grounds by casting feal and divot with the flaughter



spade and other instruments to keep up their old feal houses which he ought to have demolished at Whitsun seventeen hundred and eighty four when the new stone and mortar steadings were completely finished for accommodating the two tenants and by continuing these pendiclers against the express pleasure and consent of the said proprietors without building for them stone and mortar houses. (NLS Ms 1228:78)

These sentiments were contained in an Instrument of Protest, a legal document issued by the estate to unsatisfactory tenants who were liable to be removed from their possessions for breaking the conditions of their tacks. These instruments were posted on the church door under the legal guise of acting as a public warning, but undoubtedly the fear of such humiliation was meant to act as an added deterrent to wayward tenants.

Once the estate management had decided to rid themselves of a tenant for whatever reason they were normally able to do so relatively easily and with legal approval, due to the carefully constructed wording of the tack agreements. One case should suffice by way of example. In January 1775, Ferguson wrote to Mackenzie in Edinburgh regarding one group of unsatisfactory tenants:

The Newtyle tenants are poor, and therefore upon [?]<sup>35</sup> as they hear you are to remove them at Whitsunday. As we would not like to be foiled by these chaps it is proper to warn them timeously: I wish to know if this is to be executed by Summons before the Sheriff, or upon Precepts in the old way: if the latter I'll see it regularly executed. (NLS Ms 1272:19)

The following week, Ferguson contacted his master with an update on the situation. The tenants had provided a copy of their tack which did not expire until Whitsun 1779, in the hope of convincing the management that they were legally entitled to stay. Ferguson was not to be put off quite so easily:

... but it is provided in that Tack that "in case the tenants allow any part of the preceding year's rent to run into the current rent the Tack is to be void and null". Mr Kea, the late factor will sign a Declaration with respect to the tardy manner they paid their rents, which will break their tack: when I get this declaration I will send it to Mr Rutherford who will

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<sup>35</sup> This word is obscured in the hand-written document.

obtain Decree of Removing them. As they are considerably in arrears to Mr Kea, and otherwise deeply in debt, I beg to have your instructions how I am to secure this crop for your rent which is only payable next mid Summers, and they are daily slipping their corns off. On receiving your directions I will be alert as I can. It is money rent and not farm<sup>36</sup> they pay. (ibid.: 21)

While Ferguson was careful to treat these tenants scrupulously fairly in legal terms, he appears to have been happy to apply double standards, for he too was in a certain amount of debt to his master and others, and found great difficulty in repaying his loans on time. March 1773 sees him requesting a loan of one hundred pounds sterling from Mackenzie to see him over a 'temporary' cash shortage. Ferguson was himself the owner of a small estate, as factors of the period often tended to be, and his problems were similar to those being experienced by many small estate owners at the time who were attempting to improve their lands and therefore their rental returns. The period between financing the improvements and beginning to feel the rental benefits was for many a very long one, and this is exactly the position in which Edmund Ferguson found himself at this time. His family seat was Baledmund, a small Highland estate in the parish of Moulin nestled in amongst the enormous Atholl lands some fourteen miles north of Delvine. The estate remains in the hands of the Ferguson family to this day, but in the late eighteenth century they seemed perilously close to losing the seat, with Edmund actually having to move out of the big house to more modest quarters in Coupar Angus, letting out the Baledmund mansion. His begging letter to Mackenzie summed up his situation quite succinctly:

I apprehend it is not improper to hint on this occasion that Improvements by inclosing and otherways had enabled me to double the rent my father left me, And tho my debts are unavoidably fuelled some more than he left them, Yet I begin to have returns for the money I expended, with which I have a fair prospect of clearing myself before I be an old man. (ibid.: 5)

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<sup>36</sup> The word 'farm' here refers to the payment of rent in kind.



The money was duly provided, but come November when the funds were due to be repaid, Ferguson was floundering:

As the time I proposed for paying the contents of my bills to you is now come it is my duty to acquaint you that the people who are due to me the money tell me they will not be ready till sometime of December next, tho I warned them last Spring to be prepared at this Martinmas and gave them notices from time to time during last summer and autumn. (ibid.: 7)

Another loan was requested the following year to pay off debts caused by his mother's death, but thereafter his situation must have improved somewhat (perhaps as a consequence of moving out of Baledmund) for we hear nothing more of loan requests, as Edmund gets on with the task of bullying the tenants for their rent arrears!:

... the tenants in arrears gave me fair promises, a stile (they told me) went down very well with Mr Keay their former factor, but which I assured them would not answer with me instead of punctual payments. ... I see it is not want altogether, but Habite that occasions the Dungarthill dilatory mode of paying rent. It is my province to use discreet severity to rectify this abuse, in order to account to you for this year's rents as comfortably as I did for the last. (ibid.: 77: emphasis in original)

A detailed but relatively succinct overview of the pre-improvement condition of farming within Caputh parish, of which Delvine formed a significant part, is contained in the OSA account of 1791-92 (Vol XII: 200-01). The report's author, the Rev. William Innerarity, drew upon oral history techniques in order to create a 'before and after' comparative account of the scale of improvement.<sup>37</sup> The information, which relates to the mid point of the eighteenth century, was derived from 'some intelligent farmers, who speak from their own knowledge'. This information acts as a very useful supplement to the Delvine

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<sup>37</sup> This approach was in fact actively encouraged by Sinclair in his instructions.

papers themselves, and certainly serves to corroborate much of the factual material contained within them.

In the 1740s, we are informed, most farms had around eight tenants working the land according to the principles of run rig, 'that is one ridge belonged to one, the next to another, the third to a third person, etc.' The infield / outfield system was universally in operation, with the infield being continuously cropped with oats or bere on alternate rigs. The only other crop was flax which was grown on the occasional rig where the soil was thought to be well suited to this plant. The outfield was ploughed for three years for oats and then left as pasture for horses, cattle and sheep for six years. This manure prepared the soil for the next crop of oats. This system (in retrospect, at least) was not seen to be at all efficient: even a farmer who was able to rent up to a hundred acres of land was sometimes forced to buy in meal for his family in the summer months when the previous season's crop had been consumed. The fields were unenclosed, except for a few around the great houses of the proprietors, and the implementation was very basic and largely home made. The farmers tended to make their own carts and ploughs which were mainly of wood, with only the plough share and coulter being of iron, and plough teams comprised a combination of two horses and four or six oxen.

In short, Caputh parish differed very little from the general outline template of pre-improvement Scottish agriculture set out above.

For all Ferguson's hypocrisy, there can be little doubt that he oversaw the Delvine improvements with infectious enthusiasm and a thirst for advancement, and was meticulous in his attention to detail and indeed in reporting the progress to Mackenzie in Edinburgh. But it was Mackenzie, of course, as laird who was ultimately responsible for the changes which were taking place and who undertook the considerable financial risks involved in such large scale development. It is hardly surprising that he kept a very close eye on the

proceedings, returning regularly to Delvine at weekends and in between responding by post from Edinburgh to his factor's requests for policy decisions on any number of aspects of the improving schemes. His commitment to the improvement of his estates cannot be doubted:

If it be your Common practice I shall soon grow rich by finding proper returns from our extensive Improvements altho this new farm I project in the Muir will be a fresh addition to my expense. But you shall have no further trouble with it than being an Archetect. I shall be farmer myself or put a professor there who can Instruct us all That I may take the Start of my Betters on puting a decent face on that Mure which was not meant to Lye in Dark heather for the purpose of scalping the surface till the day of Judgement. (Mackenzie to Ogle, July 1770 NLS Ms 1135:18)

Mackenzie also insisted that the more senior members of his Delvine staff write to him weekly in order to keep him abreast of the ongoing works. His gardener, for instance, John Steuart, was obliged to keep Mackenzie informed of virtually his every move as indeed was Henry Ogle, the Northumbrian grieve who found this task more onerous than any of his other estate duties. Indeed, the correspondence between Ogle and Mackenzie provides a marvellous insight into the day to day farming activities during this improving period of Lowland Perthshire agriculture.

The improvement schemes themselves followed the usual pattern of the period: the breaking up of the old rig system and the creation of new enclosed fields was perhaps the largest ongoing project, and Ferguson's letters rarely fail to mention how well the fence or dyke building had been going of late. While the estate's regularly-employed servants certainly played an important role in such works, the account books reveal that the bulk of it was carried out by local day labourers who in the late 1770s were receiving around a shilling a day for such dyking work.

Drainage schemes were also an important advancement in Delvine at this time, especially given the estate's proximity to the flood plains of the Tay which

continued to cause major problems despite all efforts to build the most up-to-date clay tile drains at considerable cost.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, these efforts were certainly worthwhile, for despite the river's incursions, the land around Delvine (if we are to take Ferguson's correspondence as being a true reflection) certainly improved greatly as a result of these drainage schemes.<sup>39</sup>

Forestry plantations were also high on Mackenzie's list of priorities, perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the fact that Delvine was almost within sight of the colossal forestry schemes being implemented at that time just to the north by the Duke of Atholl.<sup>40</sup> The Delvine plantations were by no means insignificant either, and while oak predominated, birch, beech, elm, laburnum, spruce, larch, rowan and Scots fir were all well represented. Again day labourers served as the main workforce for these projects which obviously provided invaluable earning opportunities to the cottars and other locals around this part of Lowland Perthshire.

Farming at Delvine remained a combination of arable and livestock production throughout the improving period. The livestock was chiefly beef cattle, although most tenants and cottars seem to have kept a cow or two for their own domestic dairying needs as well as a few pigs.<sup>41</sup> Sheep were not reared in significant

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<sup>38</sup> Major floods occurred in Caputh parish in 1761, 1780, 1789 and 1791 (OSA Vol XII: 194)

<sup>39</sup> The Rev. Innerarity hailed the drainage schemes as a great success, not only because of the improved agriculture they facilitated, but also because he suspected that the drier environment was much healthier for the people: since the plains had been drained 'the ague' had virtually disappeared in the area (OSA Vol XII: 194).

<sup>40</sup> The 4th Duke was often entertained at Delvine and was undoubtedly viewed as being the most important individual in the area, judging by the sycophantic references to 'His Grace' in Ferguson's correspondence. However, it is worth bearing in mind that Mackenzie acted as legal agent for the Duke, and so this would undoubtedly have influenced local attitudes towards him.

<sup>41</sup> Pigs had for long been unpopular beasts among the Perthshire tenantry, a feeling which was indeed replicated through much of Scotland. By the late eighteenth century, a few proprietors in the county were keeping pigs, but the practice was fairly slow to be adopted by those of the lower social orders. As the minister of Longforan parish in the Carse of Gowrie explained, 'the practice is not general here; and the country people still retain some prejudice against pork: but it is wearing out gradually' (OSA Vol XI: 350)

numbers although at least one sheep park was created in the 1770s in an effort to increase the rental returns and to take advantage of a growing wool market, but we hear little else of sheep production anywhere within the Delvine records. Indeed, some of the tacks awarded by Mackenzie expressly forbade the rearing of sheep, or else charged a levy per head of sheep kept by the tenant. By the 1790s, however, sheep were certainly being kept in that area in fairly significant numbers: in 1792 there were 1800 sheep in Caputh parish as opposed to 2061 black cattle. (OSA Vol XII:199)

By the second half of the eighteenth century, much of Lowland Scotland had shifted its cereal production emphasis from bere to oats, and Delvine certainly followed this pattern. Bere was still being cultivated in significant quantities, but oats had already climbed into the position it was to continue to occupy for the next two centuries as the king of the Lowland cereals. Turnips too had become firmly established at Delvine by the 1770s as the principal winter fodder crop, and Mackenzie was most impressed with the amount of manure this produced, a by-product which was patently held in the highest of esteem by the owner who requested regular commentaries on the size of the dung heap! Both rye grass and clover added to the variety of green crops being sown, as indeed did potatoes, although surprisingly few references to this plant appear within the Delvine records of this period.<sup>42</sup>

An insight into the cultivation policy of one tenanted farm on Delvine in 1778 is provided by a letter from Ferguson to Mackenzie in March of that year, following the sudden death of the tenant, William Wright:

I am now to lay before you at one view the present state of William Wright's farm. The day you left Delvine John Rule and I looked with attention into every particular on the farm, and the day after, all the cattle, except the work oxen, horses & milk cows were brought to

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<sup>42</sup>Nonetheless, by 1792 the growing of potatoes in Caputh parish was said to be 'universal' (OSA Vol XII: 201).



Delvine: and after all it is thought the forage will turn out Scanty for the bestiale that remain. William's plan for this year's crop was 50 bolls of oat-sowing, 3 bolls of bear sowing & 3 bolls of pease sowing & 10 or 12 acres under turnip with a view to feed cattle for market. John Rule and I find that there will be 50 bolls of oat-sowing on marled-ground, but we think the acres proposed by the late tenant for turnip should be all put down under bear for which there is plenty of dung in the Yard: and that the ground he proposed for pease should be cropped in that way. There must be assistance given from Delvin to forward the labouring of this farm, otherwise the strength of men and work beasts on itself will not bring it forward in due time, but we think this can be afforded. William bought 6 bolls of change seed oats & 3 bolls of seed pease and hyred several shearers for next harvest. Shall you confirm these bargains, or alter in whole or in part? We think the quantity of victual much about the same as contained in the inventory you got but would think change-seed & shearers both proper, advantageous & necessary. There are 3 swine very near full fed & they are not to be removed till next week, when they shall be fit for market or domestic use. No further debts have transpired as yet. The whole hedges shall be cleaned without delay. (NLS Ms 1272:195)

Clearly, the widow and family of the late tenant were not left to fend for themselves, as Ferguson obviously felt an obligation to intervene by redirecting resources from elsewhere on the estate. Certainly he had an interest in ensuring that the production process continue as smoothly as possible in order to secure the rents due, and his careful consideration of the most effective contingency plans for the season's cropping bears witness to this. We are not however informed of the eventual fate of the widow and her family, but it seems unlikely that she would have continued in her lease thereafter. Ferguson's comment two years earlier following the death of another tenant provides a major clue as to his attitude on this:

You are now in a fair way of getting a proper male tenant for Braecock instead of an actionless widow, who will be a gainer by the bargain. (ibid.: 93: emphasis in original)

To be fair, this comment should not be taken as proof of a chauvinist or misogynist attitude on the factor's part, for elsewhere we find him recommending female tenants over males for a vacant farm: his philosophy was

that whatever arrangements showed the most potential for improving the overall standards on the estates should be implemented.

Attempts toward improvement were by no means confined to the land, for Mackenzie and his factors were determined to sweep away all physical representations of the old system, including the buildings on all parts of the estate. Building and renovation projects were ongoing throughout the final third of the eighteenth century in a brave attempt to achieve their vision of stone houses for all, from the Mackenzies' own home to the dwelling of the lowliest cottar. While the provision of houses and steadings down to tenant level was achieved without too much trouble (although obviously at considerable expense) plans did not run so smoothly amongst the lower orders. The cottars were the sole responsibility of the tenants: it was they who were expected to provide the accommodation for the cottars if they chose to support any, and so the estate management had less control and direct influence over this, although certainly they could still punish tenants (through threat of eviction) if they failed to keep to their terms of lease if these included specific stipulations regarding the support of cottars.

In the eyes of Ferguson the great symbol of the 'bad old days' and slovenly living was the sod or feal hut, and the continued use of these as the common form of cottar housing raised his ire perhaps more than any other breach of estate policy. Thus we find his Instruments of Protest regularly punctuated with complaints such as this dated 1782:

And it was further stipulated and agreed to that whenever the steading of Houses of the farm thereby sett, and of the other farm of Easter Caputh comprehending a dwelling house, barn, byre and stable for each of the two tenants should be finished by the Heritor in terms of the minute of tack above mentioned, then all the feal houses in the town of Easter Caputh were to be demolished and pulled down and the rubbish disposed of as the said minute of agreement directs, and if the said Andrew Bisset should incline to keep any cottars he was to build stone

and mortar houses for them thatched with straw at his own expense.  
(NLS Ms 1228:73)

That Bisset should be in such trouble for allowing his cottars to continue to live in sod houses as late as 1782 was hardly surprising, as this had been prohibited under official estate policy since at least the early 1760s. The factor at that period, the Rev. James Hill, was no less ruthless in his implementation of this policy than Ferguson. In 1765 Hill had visited the tenants of Inchtuthill farm (a multiple tenancy involving five people) and had surveyed the state of the housing, finding it to be highly unsatisfactory and in direct contravention of the terms of their tacks, which had required them to build themselves new dwellings of stone and mortar. Hill had presumably threatened them with some form of serious punishment - a heavy fine, or even eviction - as a few days later he received a delegation from them pleading with him to write to Mackenzie in their favour, as they were promising to jointly pay a fine of twenty-five pounds and renewing their obligation 'never to make or mend another feal house in their possessions'. Hill was initially of a mind to accept this but decided on another tactic in order to ensure that they kept to their word, suggesting to his master that they set the fine at fifty pounds, but that half of that would be returned 'on condition you find them active next summer in pulling down the feal houses and rebuilding them of stone and mortar'. Hill considered them well able to pay and was keen to establish a precedent by way of a deterrent (NLS Ms 1293:64).

Housing was therefore obviously seen to be an essential link in the Delvine improvement plans from an early stage, and rebuilding went on apace for the next few decades. Wherever possible, the necessary materials continued to be procured locally although the accounts do reveal the purchase of the occasional shipment of Baltic timber from a Perth-based merchant. Stone was gathered from the estates however, and local skilled masons were employed to carry out most of the actual building work. Frugality was still of the essence, and the records clearly show that sound timbers from the older cruck-framed buildings

on the estate were utilised in the new ones, and mature timber from the estate was certainly used from time to time:

Your Newtyle building is ready for lintels; I must rather than stop that work, cut down an ash tree or two about Newtile or the like for these lintels as you are aground in that timber article here: we will get a few of the many wanted from the Aird barn when it is pull'd down. (NLS Ms 1272:150)

Major improvements to existing buildings were also undertaken, although in this respect the management often seem to have been forced into action by pressure from the tenantry. Writing to Mackenzie in 1777, Ferguson shows that he was indeed sympathetic towards one group of tenants whose roofs were leaking badly, and was anxious to begin emergency repairs at once:

The last rainy day brought the Inhabitants of Spittalfield bodily down on my shoulders. Indeed they had reason as their houses were all in a sad plight. Tradesmen accordingly examined the Walls and timbers with a view to a Watertight roof. After turning this mending story into every shape, there are only two alternatives, a slate roof, or good straw thatch over the tile with proper mortar for safety from wind, as well as last. As you encourage me always to give my opinion, I am for the latter plan, as least expensive and as a thatch that will wear out the timbers of the houses, much hurt by water ousing through the tiles: that is to say, this thatch will last 20 years. The possessors will cheerfully pay any additional rent you please, so as you'l not lose by the outlay of the expense. In this, as well as every other particular, do you please to determine and I will execute your every command. (ibid.: 135)

The owner must have agreed to this suggestion, for the following week Ferguson informs him that he is looking for 'proper thatch and thatchers to set the Spittlefield houses to rights' (ibid.: 136), and a month later, the thatching is well underway. (ibid.: 144)

There was clearly much going on in the name of improvement on Delvine Estate during the final third of the eighteenth century, then, and John Mackenzie certainly played an important part in these developments, a point recognised by the author of the local OSA report of 1795:



The parish owes much of its improvement to the late John Mackenzie Esq of Delvin. By directing the attention of the trustees for manufactures, etc, to this part of the country, by bestowing well-judged rewards and giving encouragement in various ways, he excited a spirit of industry and improvement which has operated with energy and success. (OSA Vol XII: 202)

Nonetheless, by the final few years of the century there was still cause for complaint as far as the agriculture of the area was concerned. Much of Caputh parish remained unenclosed by 1795, and thirlage to estate mills continued to be the focus of considerable grievance among the local tenantry and indeed the cause of bitter comment by the Rev. Mr Innerarity who expressed his desire to be rid of 'this odious remainder of feudal tyranny' (ibid.: 215). Much had been achieved, but for some it was simply not enough.

### *Lowland Perthshire Improvement*

While the Delvine estates witnessed significant improvements during the late eighteenth century, they were by no means unique, for elsewhere in the south and east of the county change was taking place at varying speeds. Indeed, Delvine could be placed somewhere around the mid-point of the improving spectrum within this wider Lowland Perthshire context. The 'advanced' pole was undoubtedly represented by the farmers of the Carse of Gowrie, that flat, narrow strip of fertile land stretching from Perth to Dundee sandwiched between the Sidlaw Hills and the banks of the Tay. Again, the key to improvement here had been the drainage schemes of the 1740s and 50s, transforming the sodden and uncultivable carse lands into one of the most fertile arable areas of Scotland.

But before this drainage was undertaken, the farming patterns there were no different from anywhere else in Perthshire, and took a very similar form to those already described in relation to Delvine. The infield and outfield system prevailed, with the infield being constantly manured and sown with pease, oats, barley and a little wheat, while the outfield remained six years untouched



followed by three crops of oats. 'The produce of every kind was indifferent' (OSA Vol XI: 167). The rigs were divided in the usual manner and the land was strewn with stones. Broom and furze grew wild in the ditches between the rigs which dominated the wet and untidy landscape. The fields were unenclosed and the cattle could not be wintered in large numbers as turnips and potatoes had not yet been adopted there to any significant degree (OSA Vol XI: 268-9; Donaldson 1794)

Following the completion of a number of drainage schemes in the 1750s, though, the pace of improvement in the Carse was little short of spectacular, and by the 1790s the entire area had been completely transformed and was undoubtedly the envy of the rest of Scotland's farmers north of the Forth. Rigs were straightened and then flattened, fields were enclosed and the small *fermtouns* which peppered the area were replaced with large, single-tenanted farms concentrating almost exclusively on arable production. While towards the western end of the Carse, units were generally of fifty to a hundred acres, further east towards Dundee in the parishes of Errol, Longforan and Inchtute, most farms were upwards of one hundred acres in size, and indeed holdings of two and even three hundred acres were by no means uncommon there by the turn of the century. While oats, barley and pease continued to be cultivated in large quantities, the Carse of Gowrie quickly established itself as one of the principal wheat growing regions of Scotland, and while the terms of the leases were officially encouraging the tenants to grow oats, barley and wheat in equal ratios to maintain a strict six-shift rotation, in practice they were finding their wheat to be the most profitable part of their production and so by the 1790s, this had already become the dominant cereal there:

As this is the principal crop which recompenses the toil and expense of the farmer, it is perpetually encroaching on the grounds belonging to other kinds of grain. (OSA Vol XI: 167)

The effects of this revolution - for in the Carse, revolution it certainly was - began to be felt in the neighbouring areas as the benefits of success were there for all to see. Some Carse tenant farmers began to move out to other Lowland parishes taking their new skills and methods with them, thus aiding the diffusion process west and north into the heartland of the county. In Abernethy, to the south of Perth on the opposite banks of the Tay from the Carse of Gowrie, Carse farmers were taking over tenancies and acting as a catalyst for change through leading by example. There, little or no improvement had taken place before 1782, when one or two Carse tenants began to settle in the parish. For the first time, regular and planned crop rotation patterns were seen there (fallow, wheat, green crop, barley, grass, oats) as these farmers simply adopted the six-shift system with which they were by now so familiar. It was the reaction of the existing tenants which was of interest:

Nor have the old tenants, with listless apathy, seen the exertions and improvements of those who have settled among them: they have not only copied, but even tried to excel them in improvement. (*ibid.*: 6)

While nowhere else in Perthshire was the pace and extent of agricultural improvement so great as in the Carse of Gowrie, there were few places where change of some degree was not ongoing in the last few decades of the eighteenth century. In Strathmore, which runs from Perth in a north easterly direction towards Forfar in Angus on the other side of the Sidlaw range from the Carse of Gowrie, developments were steady if unspectacular. Half way up the Strath in Coupar Angus parish, the old rigs had largely disappeared by 1795, as had the last vestiges of the infield / outfield division, although much of the arable land had yet to be enclosed (*ibid.*: 87-88). The pattern emerging there was one of mixed farming as opposed to the purely arable production established on the other side of the Sidlaws. In Coupar Angus, cattle remained an important element within the local economy, an aspect of production which was greatly enhanced by the widespread cultivation of turnips for use as winter fodder. The cattle were sold to drovers 'or such as keep grass parks, who feed them and take

them to Falkirk to meet the English merchants' (ibid.: 88). In livestock terms, cattle remained dominant, for in common with the other parishes in the Strath, sheep did not figure strongly within the system of husbandry which emerged there at this time. The grain crops were similar in balance to those further west in Delvine, although the soil in Strathmore was of sufficient quality to allow the cultivation of a little wheat. Oats and pease were raised both for domestic consumption and for sale in the village of Coupar Angus, while barley was generally sold to the brewers in the village or transported outwith the area. Potatoes, which were only introduced to the parish in a significant way around 1770, were, by the turn of the century, said to be of great service to the poor, and so large quantities were grown locally accordingly.

A very similar pattern existed at this time in the neighbouring parish of Cargill where the farmers were following a four-shift programme of rotation, but where only one third of the lands had been enclosed by 1793 (ibid.: 63). While holdings had been broken up into individual tenancies by this time, the communal spirit had certainly not been broken:

But there is nothing more characteristic of the people here, than the assistance they afford, and the sympathy they show to one another in distress. Instances might be produced of this kind, that would do honour to more elevated stations. (ibid.: 70)

On the fringes of the Lowland part of the county, in those parishes which lay in the shadow of the Highland land mass, the pace of change was somewhat slower and the extent of improvement rather less marked than was the case in the areas mentioned thus far. In Moneydie improvements had only been ongoing for eight or nine years by 1792 (ibid.: 455). The infield and outfield classification was 'wearing out' but had certainly not disappeared completely, and while those who were described as 'new farmers' were using the 'new' plough, most tenants continued to use their Old Scots ploughs (ibid.: 455). Both potatoes and turnips were being widely grown however. In neighbouring Logie Almond, an annexed

*quod sacra* parish, change of any kind was not forthcoming until 1791, when a new proprietor abolished runrig and divided the lands into small, compact holdings of twenty to forty acres each 'with the laudable intention of providing for all his tenants, and such of their sons as incline to agriculture' (ibid.: 463). In Kinclaven, just across the Tay from Delvine, the touns had given way to small farm units of around twenty to fifty acres each, but more than half the parish remained unenclosed by the 1790s, and many acres of moor and waste land were as yet unimproved (ibid.: 258). Blairgowrie parish, part of which lay in Strathmore, but which also stretched into the higher ground to the north, had made reasonable progress in the late 1780s as far as enclosure was concerned, but at least three quarters of the parish remained in open fields and very few farms had yet been subdivided (OSA Vol XII: 130). The author of the OSA report for that parish was in no doubt as to the agricultural needs of the area:

Converting into money the services performed by the tenants, inclosing and subdividing their farms, and making plantations of larches and Scotch firs in the hilly and moorish grounds, would doubtless tend much to the cultivation and Improvement of this country. (ibid.: 135-6)

It can be seen, then, that the pace, scale and orientation of improvement was by no means uniform throughout Lowland Perthshire in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the pattern is strongly consistent with the national Scottish picture of this period, as improvements generally diffused in a north westerly direction from the Lothian epicentre. Within Perthshire, the south east extremities of the county, represented by the Carse of Gowrie, undoubtedly led the way in terms of the scale and pace of change, while the lands further north and west tended to remain longer in their original form. This general trend was only really broken by the reforming zeal of individual lairds, of whom John Mackenzie of Delvine is perhaps the prime example. Although operating on the Highland fringes of the county, his organisation, enthusiasm and perhaps most importantly, his wealth, allowed him to attain achievements which went far beyond reasonable expectations.



### *Highland Perthshire Improvement*

The lands to the north and west of the Highland Boundary Fault line were of a very different physical character to those of Lowland Perthshire, but in essence, the modes of production in operation there during the first half of the eighteenth century differed little to those outlined above. A very similar pattern of runrig cultivation existed in the Highland area, with joint- and multiple-tenancies dominating the tenure patterns, infield and outfield divisions proliferating and a mixed arable and pastoral mode of husbandry being universally followed. Sheep farming did not emerge as the dominant land use system until the early nineteenth century, and was very much a consequence of the improvement process.

However, certain aspects of social organisation were notably different in the Highland area in the pre-improvement period, the consequences of which were certainly evident in the methods of estate management employed in some areas in the north and west of the county. There can be little doubt, for instance, that the principles of clanship were notably stronger in the Gaelic speaking communities of Breadalbane and in this respect, this area continued to look north and west for its cultural sustenance, in contrast to Lowland Perthshire which increasingly turned its face towards the south.<sup>43</sup> The dominance of the Earls of Breadalbane cannot be ignored, for the power and influence they were able to exert over the people in the north west of the county was immense. This was brought emphatically to the fore in 1745, when the tenants on these estates found that they were having to toe the political line of their landlord in their practical reactions to the Jacobite call to arms:

During the rebellion of '45, the Earl of Breadalbane espoused the Hanoverian cause, and was the means of preventing the most of his clan

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<sup>43</sup> One obvious marker of this was the continued use of the Gaelic language within the Highland area. The oral narrative tradition also reflects these cultural differences: collections such as that carried out by Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray, daughter of the 7th Duke of Atholl reveal that such themes as clan warfare and fairy belief continued to dominate the imaginations of the North Perthshire tenantry in the late 19th century (see Robertson and Young, 1996).



from taking up arms for Prince Charlie, as their inclination would have led them to do. (Ramsay 1930)

The other great power base in North Perthshire was the Dukedom of Atholl, but as Leah Leneman points out in her detailed study of eighteenth century life on these estates,

The idea that in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries all of Highland Scotland was divided into clan territories of hereditary chiefs or chieftains does not hold for the territory of Atholl in the central Highlands. (Leneman 1986:1)

This was largely due to the fact that the family who succeeded through marriage to the lands and title in the seventeenth century, the Murrays of Tullibardine, were in fact a Lowland family and knew little of and cared little for the paternalist principles of clanship which provided the linchpin of local social organisation and identity further north and west. Nonetheless, the first half of the eighteenth century was a troubled time for the Dukes of Atholl, as of course it was for most Highland aristocratic houses, and they could not rely on their Lowland roots to escape being caught up in the revolutionary political intrigue of the Jacobite period. However, despite the starring role played in Prince Charles' army by Lord George Murray, younger brother to the second Duke, and the succession row of the middle years of the century culminating in the bizarre concept of the simultaneous existence of two Dukes,<sup>44</sup> the family emerged into the post-Culloden peace relatively unscathed and free to turn their attention towards the improvement of their vast estates.

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<sup>44</sup> William, Marquis of Tullibardine and the eldest son of the 1st Duke, was a committed Jacobite and played important roles in the risings of 1715, 1719 and 1745. As a result, his father, loyal to the Hanoverian cause, obtained an Act of Parliament to make his second son, James, his rightful heir. In 1745, with Charles' army heading for Blair Castle in great strength of numbers, Duke James, who had acceded to the title in 1724, fled south and William took possession of the seat proclaiming himself to be the rightful Duke. Normality resumed following William's death from a fatal illness while imprisoned in the Tower of London on charge of treason in 1746.

Leah Leneman's penetrating study of the Atholl improvements leaves little need for further detailed analysis here, but it is certainly worth pointing out that the Atholl experience proves that the largest estates did not necessarily witness the most rapid or far-reaching improvements. Land there may have been in plenty, but spare cash seems to have been something of a stranger to the coffers of Blair Castle, for as Leneman reveals, the one complaint the successive eighteenth century Dukes had in common was a constant shortage of money (Leneman 1986:10-11). Despite this, the second Duke (1724-64) certainly undertook improvements, but these were strictly limited to 'purely aesthetic embellishments of his properties' (ibid.: 12) and the forward march of agricultural advancement halted firmly at the boundaries of his home farm. The third Duke, whose tragic suicide in 1774 limited his reign to a solitary decade, nonetheless achieved much, instigating the first real push toward genuine estate improvement, a legacy which was to be solidly built upon by his successor who was so often to grace the house of Delvine with his presence.

The tacks awarded during the third Duke's reign included important clauses forcing tenants to begin improving their lands by fallowing or introducing rotation principles using crops such as potatoes, clover or turnips, and in similar manner to the Delvine policy, these stipulations went as far as ensuring the upgrading of housing was also undertaken (ibid.: 33). The third Duke did not expect to lay the full financial burden of these improvements on his tenants, though, and forwarded considerable sums to them in the form of loans in order to provide them with the means to employ people to actually carry out the necessary work. These loans were not interest-free, however, for the recipients found their rents increased by 7.5% accordingly. In 1770, for instance, the Duke advanced £328-12 in this way to a total of fifteen tenants which brought him an increased rental from these particular holdings amounting to £24-12-11 per annum. (ibid.: 26)

However, only the more enthusiastic and forward-looking tenants took advantage of this scheme, and it is by no means unlikely that many who did not may have seen it as something of an imposition to expect them to pay for the improvements which were ultimately going to be of benefit to the Estate. Whether or not such an attitude, if it existed, took its toll, it was certainly clear that practical improvement over such a huge area as the Atholl lands represented could not be completed within the space of a few years: by the time the fourth Duke took over in 1774 there remained much still to do. Looking back some years later on the state of Atholl the year he succeeded, the fourth Duke recalled a picture which was anything but rosy. Implements, he asserted, were of the worst construction, the ploughs being cumbersome and requiring four horses and two men to operate them, and the carts having solid wooden wheels; no form of crop rotation was being followed; the infield and outfield system prevailed and these were manured only from the old thatch of the houses which themselves were of the most basic form (*ibid.*: 33). While we may allow a little for the fact that the Duke was penning these words some years after the time to which they refer and that they may therefore be tainted with just a little propaganda to place his own achievements in a favourable light, the evidence uncovered by Leneman reveals that his assessment was by no means wildly inaccurate.

Across in Breadalbane, estate life was certainly not static either, and it would seem that for a short time at least in the early part of the eighteenth century, the Earl was looking towards Atholl as a source of agricultural inspiration. The issuing of written as opposed to orally-agreed leases had been common in Atholl as early as 1725, for instance, and the home farm improvements of the second Duke had caught the attention of the Breadalbane Earl who requested the hire of the Duke's experts for a short while in order to advise on his own improvements (Leneman 1986: 32)<sup>45</sup>. It is perhaps of little surprise that such contact should

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<sup>45</sup> The Earl wrote to the Duke on October 21 1735 commenting that he was 'following your Graces Example in miniature'.

have been taking place between the two houses, as they certainly held much in common during this period: both estates were massive, and they completely dominated Highland Perthshire between them. They also shared certain organisational traits which set them apart somewhat from the rest of the Highlands. The most notable factor here was the lack of tacksmen, members of that middle class of Highlander who were normally the key to estate and clan organisational machinery further north and west. Tacksmen did not figure prominently in either Atholl or Breadalbane, and those who did exist were largely to be found on the extreme Highland fringes of both estates in certain parts of Rannoch in the north and Balquhiddy to the west. Elsewhere in the Highlands, tacksmen were often close blood relatives of the chiefs, who took the lease of large tracts of land, farming a small portion for themselves and leasing the rest out to sub-tenants. Leneman suggests that their absence from Atholl was simply due to the fact that the Murrays were originally from the Lowlands and therefore did not have the local network of extended family relationships from which tacksmen could be chosen. While this argument, simple as it may be, certainly seems convincing it does not of course explain why Breadalbane followed the same pattern. The Campbells had a very long history of land ownership in the area and so there would have been no problems in finding suitable kin through whom local power could be devolved. This is one aspect of the history of the area which remains unclear.

Whatever the reason was for the absence of tacksmen in Breadalbane, the situation necessitated the development of an alternative system of estate management in the pre-improvement period, as in most other areas of the Highlands tacksmen fulfilled important peace-time roles in this respect. The system which operated in Breadalbane during the second half of the eighteenth century warranted applause from one of the most critical of contemporary expert



visitors to the area, William Marshall<sup>46</sup>. Marshall had very little of a positive nature to say about the agriculture of the Central Highlands at this time, but he was impressed with the Breadalbane management machinery which involved the division of the Estate into *officiaries*. On Loch Tayside, Marshall reports, each officary included one to three square miles of valley land and a portion of hill on which were situated ten to twenty farms:

... each farm or petty township being subdivided into farmlets, generally from two to six or eight in number; or in some few instances the farms remain entire, or have been brought back to their original entirety.  
(Marshall 1794: 25)

Within each of these officaries there resided a ground officer, generally a principal tenant, similar in many ways to the English bailiff. His duties were to deliver notices from the landlord to the tenants and ensure that all the services of the latter were carried out correctly. The other notable office within the system was that of 'birleyman'. Birleymen were 'sworn appraisers or valuers' whose task it was to settle disputes between landlord and tenant or more usually, between neighbouring tenants. According to Marshall this system, which also existed in Atholl, worked very well.

The absence of tacksmen in Breadalbane resulted in the common practice of tenants holding lands directly of the chief or landlord, either as individuals or more often jointly with a number of other tenants. Of the 109 farms surveyed on Loch Tayside in 1769 only ten were held by single tenants while the remainder were held jointly by groups of up to ten in number (*Survey 1769*). Thus, multiple-tenancies were more common here than further south in Delvine, but

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<sup>46</sup> Marshall, a Yorkshireman, has been hailed as 'one of the greatest of all commentators' on agricultural matters during the late eighteenth century (Withers 1986: 31). While most of his writing pertains to the English situation, he spent four months in Breadalbane in 1792 followed by a shorter stay the following year. The fact that he was invited to lodge with the Earl himself during his stay allowed him to witness the effects of Estate policy at first hand, but this in no way seems to have tempered the tone of his report which is highly critical of the state of the area in agricultural terms (Marshall 1794).



were roughly on a par with Atholl, where in 1778 the largest number of tenants jointly renting a farm was seven (Leneman 1986: 17).

Immediately below the tenant farmers in the hierarchy of tenure in Breadalbane were the crofters and pendiclers, a few of whom held lands directly from the laird but most of whom sub-let from the tenants. In Breadalbane the rank of all those living on the estate seems to have been determined by the quantity and quality of the land in their possession, for while the tenants' holdings consisted of 'infield, outfield, meadow, grass, wood, moor and perhaps moss', the crofters' land included infield but no outfield. The distinction between crofter and pendicler is unclear, however. Cosmo Innes (1872: 266-7), referring to the situation further south on the Drummond Estates in 1762, states that the major point of departure between the two was that the cattle of the crofters were herded and pastured along with those of the tenants while those of the pendiclers were not. This certainly suggests that in that part of the county at least there was a perceived status difference, with crofters enjoying a slightly elevated position over the pendiclers, but there is no indication that this was so in Breadalbane, or anywhere else in Perthshire for that matter.

Whatever the relationship was between crofters and pendiclers, there is little doubt that both were superior in social and economic terms to those on the next level down within the estate hierarchy, the cottars. The cottars occupied a small piece of arable ground given to them at will by the tenants in return for labour services and perhaps a little money rent. Cottars were thus essentially farm servants working for those higher up the hierarchy and appear to have had few rights of any kind in terms of their tenure status, and indeed for the most part they remain fairly anonymous within any form of Breadalbane Estate records of the period. Their holdings are not featured on the plans drawn up following the 1769 Survey of Lochtayside for instance, while those of the cottars and pendiclers do appear. Either their plots were of such insignificant size as to fail

to warrant inclusion, or else the agreements with the tenants who placed them were so informal as to be considered an irrelevancy.

While Breadalbane tenants followed the usual infield and outfield system of land use which was shared by their contemporaries throughout Scotland and indeed over a large area of Northern Europe, there does appear to have been a particularly marked concentration upon infield production upon Lochtayside during the second half of the eighteenth century. According to the 1769 Survey, more of the ground was designated infield than outfield, the specific ratio being 21.8 acres of infield to 16.3 acres of outfield. These figures were corroborated by William Marshall as late as 1794:

On the sides of Loch Tay the nominal farms or petty townships contain on a par, about twenty acres of infield, fifteen acres of outfield (Marshall 1794: 32)

This was highly unusual, for throughout Scotland in general, it was more common for the outfield to exceed the infield in terms of size although not in value. Writing to Lord Kames in 1764, Prof. John Walker asserted that in Scotland the outfield land was around four times the size of the infield (but only one tenth of the value) while Miss Grant shows that on Balnespik farm on Speyside the greater part of the cultivated land was classed as outfield (Grant 1930: 292).

It is by no means clear why or indeed when this situation arose within Breadalbane, although the desire to cultivate as much arable land as possible does seem to have been strong there during this period; the surveyors employed by the Earl in 1769 regarded the 'industrious farmer' as one who spent most of his time ploughing:

The pasture within the head dyke is capable of being made arable as well as that which is arable and would be of more advantage than the way it is used just now. (*Survey* 89)

The nineteenth century shift towards pastoralist production and later, deer stalking, was showing few signs of development at this period, therefore, for in 1769 bere and oat cultivation remained the staples of the Breadalbane economy. On average, the amount of bere seed sown was about one quarter that of oats according to the Survey, while Grant suggests that in Speyside during this period the ratio was around 1:3 (Grant 1928: 48). Potatoes had clearly not achieved much popularity by this stage, for in 1769 the farm of Inchadry was the sole Loch Tayside location of any experimentation in this respect. Breadalbane was slow to embrace this crop, for potatoes had been the focus of a certain amount of Atholl interest as early as 1725, although their cultivation did not become widespread there until the 1770s.<sup>47</sup> From that decade, though, the rate at which the people of north and west Perthshire adopted this crop was spectacular, and by the time the OSA reports were being compiled in the 1790s the importance of the potato to the local people was not in doubt. To the author of the Fortingall Account the potato was the major source of the improved prosperity he detected in the parish, a view shared by his colleagues in many of the surrounding districts. (OSA Vol XII)

Improvements to the Breadalbane Estates had been ongoing to some extent early in the eighteenth century, but in common with most of their peers, the Earls of Breadalbane found the financial obstacles in their way very hard to overcome. On his succession to the title, the second Earl had found the estate in debt to half its value in mortgage, but despite, or perhaps because of this, he set about the immense task of economic improvement. His achievements were not so much in the field of agriculture, but rather in the construction of better communications in the area in the form of roads and bridges, thus helping to create the necessary infrastructure upon which any subsequent significant farming improvement

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<sup>47</sup> A 1725 Judicial Rental of Atholl (AM 42.II(1) 9) contained the following observation: 'The tenants of Blair Wachter are obliged by their tacks to sow pittatoes, turneps, and carots, to thatch their biggings with heather, to enclose an acre or two of their ground yearly and to build ston chemneys in their houses and to sow pease'.

greatly depended. He also encouraged his tenants towards a more diverse form of home industry. By 1728 he was persuading several tenants on the estate to grow flax, and while the linen industry did not really take off to any significant degree in the area until much later in the century, some home spun yarn using locally grown flax was certainly being sold in the early 1730s (*Survey*: li).

The Earl's debts, however, prevented any large scale investment in the estate, and it was left to his successor, the third Earl, to continue to work towards clearing the debt and begin where his father had left off. Now, genuine attempts towards soil improvement began although as was often the case, to begin with this was really restricted to the home farm. Adam Smith would not have been impressed:

We have in Scotland some noblemen whose estates extend from the east to the west sea, who call themselves improvers and are so called by their countrymen when they cultivate two or three hundred acres around their family seat, while they allow the rest of their country to lie to waste. (ibid.: xvii)

The counter argument to this is that improving lairds had to start somewhere and that it was incumbent upon them to lead by example. Many had their hands tied financially because of the constricting tendencies of one aspect of the Scottish Civil Law which discouraged long term financial investment. The Breadalbane Estates had been entailed in 1704, and the entail, under the 1685 Act, contained clauses which limited holders of such entail from granting leases for longer than their own lifetime. As a result, the heirs of entail (successive estate owners) could not become creditors to preceding heirs for any debts incurred, and this was exactly the situation in which the third Earl found himself before 1770. That year, however, a vital step towards the general improvement of Scottish agriculture was taken when legislation was passed in Parliament effectively removing this unnecessary barrier<sup>48</sup>. This was the spur which Breadalbane

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<sup>48</sup> *An Act to Encourage the Improvement of Lands, Tenements and Hereditaments in that Part of Great Britain called Scotland held under Settlement of Entail* (10 Geo.iii. c.51) This Act is



needed, and it was while this legislation was going through its parliamentary preliminaries in 1769 that the Earl commissioned a survey of his Loch Tayside lands to be undertaken with the view to planning the forthcoming improvements.

One of the most obvious faults of the existing system was the insecurity of tenure under which the tenants existed, for leases were generally still agreed orally and on an annual basis. This naturally reduced the incentive to improve holdings, for there was no guarantee that they would themselves reap any benefits in the years to come. By 1771, the Earl had set about granting new leases of twenty-one years, all of which included clauses designed to encourage, or indeed coerce, the tenants into carrying out certain improvements. These clauses were by no means vague theoretical instructions on possible methods of production pulled from the pages of one or other of the reforming pamphlets which flooded the country at this time, but rather contained very specific stipulations and requirements which had to be met if the lease was not to become void. In the Breadalbane tacks of this period, it was stipulated that the lands had to be properly manured, one fifth of the arable land had to be left fallow or sown under a green crop such as turnips, pease or clover, which in turn provided much-needed winter cattle fodder. Fields were to be enclosed at specific rates each year with either a stone dyke or a ten-foot ditch, and as was the case in Atholl, finance was lent for this at the rate of 7.5% per annum. Thirlage to Estate mills, the cause of much resentment and frustration, was largely abandoned too at this time.

Such strict terms were commonly being included in new leases throughout Perthshire in the late eighteenth century: it was the specific route through which improvement could be channelled. On the Dalguise Estate for instance, just to the north of Dunkeld, nineteen-year leases were being granted in the 1790s,

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often referred to as 'the Montgomery Act' after Sir James Montgomery, the Lord Advocate who was its parliamentary sponsor.



containing very similar clauses to those being issued further up the Tay valley in Breadalbane. A tack agreement between the Laird and one tenant, John McIntosh, contained a number of very specific instructions concerning the way the lands were expected to be farmed. McIntosh, and many others like him who were also granted tacks at this time had to

... always have half an acre sown out yearly with grass seeds and half an acre in turnips, that he shall straight his ridges in the haughs twixt the Road and Water and shall glebe his arable ground above the road and destroy and keep down the broom in all the parks below the Leikin Park. (SRO GD 38/1: 1125)

But despite all these genuine attempts at improving the estates of Highland Perthshire, the century closed with complaints continuing to ring in the ears of the landlords, as for many onlooking commentators, change for the better was not progressing quickly enough. To William Marshall, in Breadalbane there was

nothing to be seen but stones and dry blades of couch grass or other pallid remains of unpasturable herbage: the pasture and meadow lands gnawed to the quick and strewed with the carcasses of sheep....The cattle too are in a starving state. (Marshall 1794: 38)

He noted the improvements which had taken place around the Campbell seat at Taymouth where the rental of the land had risen from around half a crown to twenty-five shillings per acre, reflecting a rich and productive improved soil there, but that apart, there was little else which impressed him. Indeed, the five principles of improvement he suggests should be undertaken in the area are testimony to the scale of work he believed still remained to be carried out (ibid.: 40):

- Permit the present inhabitants to remain in the country; and endeavour to make it the interest of everyone to assist in its improvement.
- Use every means of supplying, by art, the natural defects of climature.
- Reclaim the soil from its present state of rudeness and endeavour to render every part of it productive.

- Adapt the productions (whether vegetable or animal) to the soil, the climature, and the present number of inhabitants, taken jointly.
- Let the subordinate branches of improvement grow out of those leading principles, which I shall consider as the ground work of these proposals.

Many of the parish clergy of Highland Perthshire were also less than enthusiastic about the rate of progress in their OSA reports. In Moulin parish, home of Delvine's factor Edmund Ferguson, many farms were still 'intermixed together in the way called run-ridge' in 1791, an arrangement labelled 'most inconvenient and absurd' by the Rev. Mr Stewart (OSA Vol XII: 766). His colleague in Kenmore noted that most farms were still subdivided among several tenants and that leases were still being agreed verbally on an annual basis, amounting to a system under which agriculture could not be expected to make much progress (*ibid.*: 467-8). At the opposite end of Loch Tay in the parish of Killin, only the gentlemen farmers of the area were cultivating turnips and sown grasses due to a general lack of enclosed land. But perhaps the words of the minister of Logierait best sum up the general feelings of these local commentators, who were keen to see the improving spirit take a stronger hold for the benefit of their parishioners:

It would tend much to the advantage and cultivation of this country, if the services performed by tenants were converted into money. At present they perform many carriages to a distance; make the peats and carry them home: In part they till the ground of the proprietor in Spring, and cut down his corn in harvest. The establishment of manufactures; the enlargement of the farms, so as to enable every farmer to keep a plough for himself; the enclosure of the fields; the division of the commons; the straightening of the ridges in plowing; the giving up of the prevalent practice of run-ridges; and the spreading of plantations of larches and Scotch firs over the wild and barren hills, would, no doubt, contribute greatly to improve the condition, and increase the population of this parish. (OSA Vol XII 717)

### **Post-improvement Perthshire: Towards a Cultural Ecology Model**

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, then, the winds of agricultural change had certainly reached every part of the County of Perthshire, but there is no doubt that while in some areas these winds were reaching storm force proportions, in others they represented only the merest whisper of a breeze. Much had been achieved, certainly, and the landscape in some parts of the county had been transformed and must have looked very different to the late-summer observer with its golden and green rectangular enclosed parks and houses and steadings of stone. But by 1800, the transformation was by no means complete. As we have seen, some of the more fertile straths and plains of the south east of the county had witnessed remarkable developments in a short space of time, while in such areas as Atholl and Breadalbane the improving process was much more drawn-out and somewhat patchy to say the least. But to conclude, as it is perhaps rather tempting to do, that by 1800 the Perthshire Lowlands had reached a state of agricultural advancement while the Highland area had not, would be to generalise to the point of inaccuracy.

While the division of Perthshire into 'Highland' and 'Lowland' regions has been a useful tool for discussion purposes thus far in this study, such a distinction undoubtedly serves to over-simplify the complex patchwork pattern of agricultural production modes which emerged in the county as a consequence of the Improvements. The Highland / Lowland dichotomy exists in Perthshire in geological terms, certainly, but neither the economic nor the cultural adaptations to these environments which took root in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries fall quite so neatly into such a simple model of duality. To categorise the Carse of Gowrie under the same general heading as the parish of Caputh in which Delvine is situated, for instance, would be to force two very different animals into the same cage, despite the fact that both can certainly be classed as Lowland in any sense of the term. In the pre-improvement period this would have had a greater degree of validity, but as we have seen, their respective

agricultural infrastructures and emphases became very different as a result of these changes. Similarly, not all areas to the north and west of the Highland divide came to rely to equal degrees on such modes of husbandry as sheep farming and game stalking during the nineteenth century, as shall be demonstrated below: in certain parts of the fertile Highland basins of the Tay, Tummel and Earn, arable production remained very important as indeed did the rearing of beef cattle. Furthermore, the professional and social organisational patterns which developed within all these different localities mentioned above as a reaction to these shifting modes of production were by no means uniform either; these points too will be the focus of the coming chapters. Thus, continued reference to a Highland / Lowland divide is of limited use when referring to the post-improvement cultural and agricultural patterns of Perthshire.

Nonetheless, it remains worthwhile to attempt to provide some framework for analytical and discursive purposes, and to this end, consideration of the principles involved in cultural ecology studies should prove of some use. Cultural ecology is essentially concerned with the symbiotic relationship between humans and their natural environment - 'a method of studying the role played by ecological adaptation in cultural variations and changes' (Stoklund 1976: 85). According to one of the pioneers of this 'school', Julian Steward (1964: 434-5), there are three fundamental procedures of cultural ecology: first of all the inter-relationship between exploitative or productive technology and the environment must be studied (material culture); secondly, the behaviour patterns involved in the use of these technologies should be considered (social organisation) and finally, and most problematically, analysis should be undertaken of the extent to which these behaviour patterns involved in exploiting the environment affect other aspects of culture. Once these factors have been scrutinised, areas demonstrating common links based on the above criteria can be identified as belonging to the same cultural type or *ecotype*:

Cultural types therefore, must be conceived as constellations of core features which arise out of environmental adaptations and which represent similar levels of integration. (ibid.: 436)

These core features, labelled by Steward as 'the cultural core', are defined as 'the constellation of features which are most closely related to subsistence activities' (ibid.: 432), and stand in contrast to *secondary* features which are determined to a greater extent by 'purely cultural historical factors - by random innovations or by diffusion' and which create superficial appearances of cultural difference between groups who actually have very similar cores (ibid.: 432).

Within a European framework Scandinavian ethnologists have embraced these ideas enthusiastically, and the work of scholars such as Bjarne Stoklund and Åke Campbell in Denmark and Orvar Lofgren in Sweden can provide very useful models of approach for us here in Scotland. Campbell's techniques preceded the formalising of the cultural ecology school by several decades, but his work fits very neatly into its conceptual framework and indeed has been the inspiration behind more recent Scandinavian ethnological approaches in this respect. His 1928 thesis identifies two contrasting ecotypes in pre-industrial Denmark, *slettebonde* (peasant of the plain) and *skovbonde* (peasant of the woodland). The cultural cores of each of these are outlined in Table 1.1 below.



**Table 1.1**  
*Skovbonde and Slettebonde Core Features*

<i>Skovbonde</i> (peasant of the woodland)	<i>Slettebonde</i> (peasant of the plain)
continuous cultivation / infield - outfield	three-course rotation
emphasis on animal husbandry	emphasis on arable farming
farming and additional subsistence	farming alone
single farms / small villages	larger villages
few village trades (artisans etc.)	numerous village trades
informal social organisation	formalised social organisation
a wide distribution of contacts	a narrow distribution of contacts
considerable mobility	little mobility
the 'entrepreneur spirit'	conservatism

Stoklund suggests that a third ecotype can be identified throughout large areas of pre-industrial central, west and north Jutland - *hedebonde* or 'peasant of the heath' - which also demonstrates a particular set of core cultural features, while a fourth ecotype related to the coastal marshland peasantry also attracts Stoklund's attention (1976: 86). In Sweden a wide array of ecotypes have been identified: in addition to the plains peasants and the woodland peasants (*slattbonden* and *skogsbonden* respectively), Swedish ethnologists have studied *fiskarbonden*, who combine fishing and farming, *fabodbonden* or cattle-raising peasants, *bergsmansbonden* who combine small scale industrial mining with farming, and the *fjallbonden* mountaineers who earn their living from a combination of hunting and cattle raising (Lofgren 1976: 101).

Of course, categorisation of this kind certainly has its limitations, and detailed empirical observation is always likely to throw up inconsistencies and exceptions, as Stoklund himself openly admits:

This very preliminary attempt to define eco-types or ecologically conditioned variants will undoubtedly seem clumsy and schematic, and I must at once admit that the value of experiments of this nature is

primarily heuristic. Regularities are not discernible if one is aware of them. But the reality against which these schematic pictures should be compared and tested is obviously far more complex and variable. (ibid.: 86)

Nonetheless, such an approach holds certain attractions within the context of the present study, and undoubtedly has the potential to create terms of reference which stand up to scrutiny more successfully than the use of a simple Highland / Lowland division could hope to do. Essentially, it allows our study areas to be defined not in terms of landscape alone, but rather in terms of human interaction with that landscape and indeed of social interaction among humans *within the setting* of that landscape. Culture, not nature is the primary focus of this thesis and it seems only right that the terms of reference selected should serve to mirror this.

Is it possible, therefore, to identify the existence of any specific ecotypes within post-improvement Perthshire? This question will be addressed more fully in the concluding chapter, for as has been pointed out above, several factors have to be taken into account when making such considerations. Nonetheless, solely in terms of one core feature - that of primary land use - a preliminary working model can be suggested, if only to serve as a recognisable set of terms of reference within the forthcoming discussions.

The difficulty involved here is that within Perthshire, potential ecotypes cannot be separated neatly in geographical terms in the manner which has been possible in the Scandinavian models. If we were to conduct this exercise for Scotland as a whole, then certain candidates for separate ecotype status would be identifiable: regions dominated by crofting, dairying, hill farming, arable production, etc. may well prove fruitful hunting grounds in this respect. But within the reduced scale involved in the study of a single county, the attachment of ecotypes to specific regions or areas is of little value. It is thus more fruitful to base this categorisation in the first instance upon a very simple model: reference will

therefore be made to the farming systems associated with three general Perthshire land form types - *carse*, *haugh* and *hill*.

*Carse* lands are extensive stretches of low alluvial land located along the banks of a river or firth, often susceptible to flooding, but which, when adequately drained, tend to result in extremely rich soils suitable for extensive arable production. Within a Perthshire context, and indeed within the context of Scotland as a whole, the Carse of Gowrie represents the prime example of agricultural achievement within this land form category, as is discussed above. However, onomastic study reveals several other areas of the county where carse lands are to be found.

The following *carse* names are included in the Tayside Region volume of the *Pathfinder Gazetteer* compiled by R A Hooker. Only those from within the Perthshire boundaries of this area are included here.

**Table 1.2**  
*Perthshire 'Carse' Place Names*

NAME	PATHFINDER AREA	MAP NUMBER
Carse	Aberfeldy	323
Carse Burn	Perth	350
Carse Grange	Carse of Gowrie	351
Carse Hill	Callander, Doune & Dunblane	370
Carse of Cambus	Callander, Doune & Dunblane	370
Carse of Gowrie	Carse of Gowrie	351
Carse of Kinglands	Stanley	337
Carse of Lennoch	Loch Earn & Comrie	348
Carse of Trowan	Crieff	349
Carsebreck	Strathallan	371
Carsegreen	Stanley	337
Carsehead	Crieff	349
Carsemeg	Strathallan	371
Carseview	Carse of Gowrie	351
Carsie	Dunkeld & Blairgowrie	351
Easter Carsehill	Perth	350
Wester Carsehill	Perth	350

*Carse* names, then, are relatively few in number within Perthshire, but a distinct distribution pattern is discernible, as shown in Figure 1.1 below. In addition to the Carse of Gowrie, most are found in the valleys or Straths of the Tay and Earn, with two in Strathallan and two in the vicinity of Dunblane in the south west of the county. These are the areas of the county most closely associated with larger scale commercialised arable and mixed farming in the post-improvement period, and correspond fairly closely to the principal bothy areas of Perthshire, as demonstrated in Chapter Three below.

The word *haugh* also denotes an area of alluvial land often near a river, but tends to be smaller in scale than a *carse* and is normally less conducive to intensive arable production, although within the Perthshire context, the quality of these areas is certainly rather variable. The Perthshire distribution of *haugh* place names is outlined below. Again, these have been extracted from Hooker's Gazetteer of Tayside Region.

**Table 1.3**  
*Perthshire 'Haugh' Place Names*

NAME	PATHFINDER AREA	MAP NO.
Haugh	Glenesk	284
Haugh Island	Pitlochry	309
East Haugh	Pitlochry	309
Haugh of Aberuthven	Auchterarder and Muthill	360
Haugh of Ballekin	Pitlochry	309
Haugh of Drimmie	Bridge of Cally	310
Haugh of Grandtully	Pitlochry	309
Haugh of Kercock	Stanley	337
Haugh of Kilmorich	Pitlochry	309
Haugh of Urrard	Blair Atholl	294
Haughend	Glenesk	284
Haughend	Dunkeld and Blairgowrie	324
Haughend	Alyth	325
Haughend	Bridge of Earn	361
Haughs of Caenlochan	Devil's Elbow	282
Haughs of Cossans	Letham	326
Haughs of Pittentian	Crieff	349
Haughs Strip	Alyth and Glamis	325
West Haugh	Dunkeld and Blairgowrie	324

The Gaelic equivalent to the Scots *haugh* is *dail*, Anglicised to *dal* and so place names containing this element can also be considered as denoting the likely existence of this land form locally. The distribution of *dal* names within Perthshire is tabled below.

**Table 1.4**  
*Perthshire 'Dal' Place Names*

NAME	PATHFINDER AREA	MAP NO.
Dalaneas Wood	Loch Rannoch (West)	307
Dalannoch	Dalwhinnie	267
Dalbeathie	Dunkeld and Blairgowrie	324
Dalbog	Glenesk	284
Dalbrack	Callendar, Doune and Dunblane	370
Dalcapon	Pitlochry	309
Dalchiorlich	Upper Glenlyon	321
Dalchirla	Auchterarder and Muthill	360
Dalchonzie	Lochearn	348
Dalchosnie	Kinloch Rannoch	308
Dalcroy	Kinloch Rannoch	308
Dalcrive	Perth	350
Dalguise	Aberfeldy	323
Dall	Loch Rannoch (West)	307
Dall Burn	Upper Glenlyon	321
Dalmarnock	Aberfeldy	323
Dalnacardoch	Dalnacardoch	280
Dalnacarn	Upper Glenshee	295
Dalnamein	Dalnacardoch	280
Dalrulzion	Bridge of Cally	310
Dalvey	Bridge of Cally	310
Dalvreck	Crieff	349
Daleally	Carse of Gowrie	351
Dalreichmoor	Perth	350
Easter Dalnabreck	Bridge of Cally	310
Wester Dalriach	Loch Errichty	293

The distribution of *haugh* and *dal* names is also plotted in Figure 1.1, and reveals a much wider distribution pattern than that of *carse* names. This can be considered a crude though reasonable representation of the fact that most



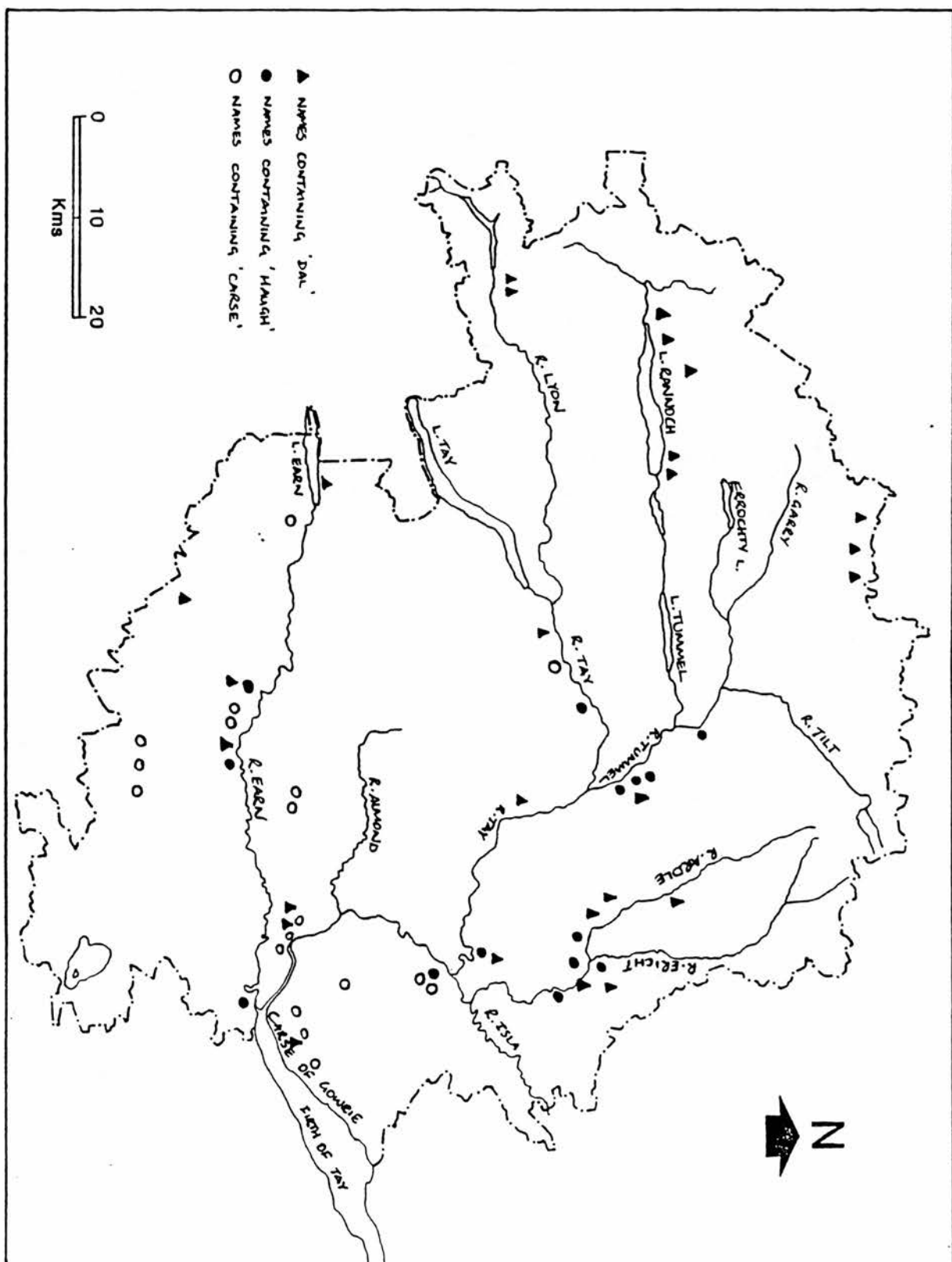
farming settlement within Perthshire was located on land of medium quality. Farming in these areas tended to be of a mixed nature, combining relatively small scale arable production with the rearing of livestock. In terms of scale, both acreages and workforce tended to be smaller than on the *carse* lands. All of these factors are addressed in the chapters below.

Hill farming represents a mainly pastoral approach to land use, and the nineteenth century marked the beginning of large scale sheep farming within the *hill* regions of Perthshire, mainly, but by no means exclusively, to the north and west of the Highland fault line. By the time of publication of the New Statistical Accounts in the 1830s and 1840s, many farming units in the hill areas had begun to place heavy reliance on the rearing of the hardy Blackface breed and to a lesser extent, the Cheviot. Although their importance to the Perthshire hill regions was reduced slightly from the final decades of the nineteenth century as more land was given over to sporting pursuits, sheep nevertheless remained central to the economic infrastructure of these areas throughout our period of study.

The intention here is to provide a terminological framework within which to proceed rather than to attempt to prove that distinct ecotypes existed in post-improvement Perthshire. *Haugh* farming (including '*dal* farming') was common on both sides of the Highland / Lowland divide, for instance, as indeed was *hill* farming. The creation of such a framework will, it is hoped, prove more satisfactory than continued adherence to the concept of the Highland/Lowland dichotomy.

Lack of space prevents the inclusion here of a detailed analytical account of the evolution of the Perthshire agricultural infrastructure through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: such an analysis can be found within the Perthshire volume of the *Third Statistical Account for Scotland*. While sheep and game increased

Figure 1.1  
Distribution of Perthshire Placenames Containing Carse, Haugh and Dal Elements



in importance in the *hill* regions, within the *carse* and *haugh* areas, the new frameworks which were created in the early stages of improvement, as outlined above, have maintained their basic shape down to the present day, although these areas have obviously shared in the technological developments and market-led shifts of emphases experienced throughout the Northern European farming community. Those developments of greatest relevance to the points raised in this thesis are discussed in the chapters below.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FAMILY ROLES

The history of the family, and of child upbringing and the place of the woman within and without the home, is so neglected in Scotland as to verge on becoming a historiographical disgrace. (Smout 1986: 292)

A reasonable amount of scholarly attention has been paid in recent decades to the domain of the adult male farm servant and labourer within Scotland,<sup>49</sup> although as has already been pointed out in the Introduction to this thesis, little of this attention has been focused upon the county of Perth. However, the roles played by both women and children within the Scottish agricultural sphere have featured only sparsely within the historical literature. The work of Devine (1984), Jamieson (1990) and Robertson (1973), amongst others, has helped to redress this imbalance a little as far as adult women are concerned, although much work remains to be done before the full impact of the female contribution is fully understood and recognised. But our understanding of the importance to the agricultural economy of child labour, and indeed, our appreciation of children's *experiences* of the farming life mode, relies almost entirely upon the findings of a single study, Jamieson and Toynbee's *Country Bairns* (1992).

In many ways, agricultural production in the post-improvement period was strongly family oriented in all its Perthshire ecological variants, for farming was not so much an occupation as a way of life. Whether or not all family members were directly involved in the work of the farm, it was extremely difficult to escape from the specific cultural flavours and modes of living which agriculture engendered. For smallholder tenants, certainly, the labour of their own

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<sup>49</sup> Scholars who have made a significant contribution to this body of literature include Adams (1991), Anthony (1993, 1993a, 1995, 1997), R H Campbell (1984, 1985, 1988, 1991), Carter (1979, 1984), Devine (1978, 1984), Fenton (e.g. 1976, 1978, 1985, 1986, 1986a, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1994, 1995), Gray (1976, 1988), Henderson (1980, 1992) and Sprott (1980, 1996).

immediate family was frequently essential, but for the partners and dependants of farm servants too, the *fermtoun* was the stage upon which their everyday lives were acted out.<sup>50</sup> Theirs was often an unsettled and semi-itinerant lifestyle, as husbands and fathers took frequently to the feeing fairs in search of better terms and conditions, many on an annual basis. For the families involved, this of course brought major and regular upheaval, as new social networks had to be accessed and local connections forged and re-kindled many times during a lifetime. For the children this often meant an extremely disrupted formal education experience as they were forced to move schools with such frequency that all continuity of the learning process was lost. This was a situation which troubled the minds of many in the local establishment, teachers and clergy alike.

This chapter seeks to examine the importance of family labour to the agricultural infrastructure of nineteenth and twentieth century Perthshire. I suggest that throughout this period children whose parents earned their livings from the soil were initiated into the farming lifemode at a very early age. Their working roles were fashioned for them according to a combination of tradition and economic necessity, thus linking them through participation to the cultural milieu of their parents' employment field. A short case study is presented of 'The Wests', my own extended family, in order to explore these issues at the micro level.

## Childhood

Throughout our period of study, earning a livelihood was by no means the sole responsibility of the adults in a family or household unit, for children were expected to contribute to the home economy at a much earlier age than would be the accepted norm today. The actual manifestation of this contribution could of course vary according to a whole host of circumstances - the size and nature of the holding they lived on; the age and sex of the child; the other labour resources

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<sup>50</sup> This is a point which comes through very strongly within the personal testimonies collected by Jamieson and Toynbee (1992).



available as well as the attitudes and aspirations of the parents - but it was rare indeed for the children of all but the wealthiest of farmers to escape the toil of the land completely. Most children in farming communities were introduced to field work and other outdoor tasks at a fairly young age, as the survey below details, for during the nineteenth century many were expected to make the economic transition from burden to asset as early as eight years old.

Many people in authority, when presented with the opportunity, expressed grave concern at the amount of work being carried out by young children in the rural areas of Scotland, viewing this as being damaging to both their moral and physical health as well as their education. In many cases the extra income a child could generate by working in the fields was enough to lure them away from the classroom. The commissioners who undertook an enquiry for the Education Commission for Scotland in 1866 concluded that school attendance was poor, particularly in the rural areas:

In agricultural districts the school is opened and the children begin to "drop in" shortly after the harvest is off the ground: but owing to this system of "dropping in one or two at a time" which some teachers consider their great grievance in the country districts, the school is not even in a tolerable state of organisation before Martinmas, and the classes cannot be thoroughly arranged or the work of the school satisfactorily carried out until the beginning of December. From December till the end of March when the Spring work commences, the attendance is good; but immediately after the annual examination by the Presbytery at the end of March and beginning of April, the numbers diminish. In the agricultural districts there is potato planting, bark peeling, turnip hoeing, cow herding and such occupations in which boys from ten years old and upwards can earn from 8d to 1s a day in the south, and from 20s to 40s, with their food, for the half year in the north, while the girls have to stay home to take care of the house and their younger brothers and sisters while their mothers are engaged in field work. In pastoral districts there is peat cutting, and in the lambing season herding and watching: and in the fishing villages there is constant occupation for children during the whole of the summer months. The parents cannot withstand these inducements. If the schools were good the children were regular in winter but very uncertain in summer; if indifferent or bad, they were irregular in winter, and did not go near the

school in summer. (*Education Commission for Scotland* 1866, quoted in *Fourth Report* 1867: 7)

An earlier source reveals that the situation in Perthshire was consistent with this national pattern of heavy reliance on child labour in the country districts. In 1843 members of the *Royal Commission on the Poor Law (Scotland)* sent a questionnaire to every minister of the established church (shortly before the Disruption took place). The questions covered a variety of topics designed to ascertain information which would shed some light on the degree of poverty existing within Scotland at that time and the remedies being actioned at local level. Question 13 was specifically aimed at the work of women and children:

Are women and children usually employed in field labour, and at what rate of wages?

The responses to this question represent a body of evidence which provides an insight into the extent to which children were employed in farming in Perthshire at that time. Unfortunately, the wording of the question was too vague to avoid ambiguity in the responses, for ministers varied in their interpretations of the word 'usually', with some volunteering qualifying information such as *how often* women and children were employed and for what specific purposes, while others responded in a much more cursory form. Despite these problems, however, this source does prove to be of value for the present purpose.

Of the sixty-three responses from Perthshire, 15.9% implied that women were employed but not children, 82.5% implied that both women and children were employed while 1.6% gave an ambiguous reply. Levitt and Smout (1979: 78) have calculated the national averages for the responses to this question, and conclude that 57% of responses implied that women were employed but not children, 40% implied that both women and children were employed, while 3% provided an ambiguous reply.

From this, it can be seen that a Perthshire child was twice as likely to be involved in agricultural work in 1843 as the 'average' Scottish child. However, the

national figures obviously include urban and industrial regions where children may well have been employed on a regular basis, but in mills and factories rather than in the fields. Thus, the national figures are of limited value for comparative purposes.

While the Poor Law Enquiry of 1843 provides some useful guidance as to the relative importance of children to the agricultural labour force of Scotland, its contribution nonetheless remains limited, for little indication is given as to the ages at which children were first employed, nor indeed the number of hours they worked or the nature of the tasks they were expected to undertake. This gap is however at least partially filled by the data contained within a later source which relates to the work of the next generation of child farm workers. *The Royal Commission Enquiry into the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture: Fourth Report*<sup>51</sup>, conducted in 1867 and published as a Parliamentary Paper in 1870, provides an excellent synchronic snapshot of the extent to which children were employed in agricultural tasks at this time. The Perthshire evidence is mainly confined to the Lowland parishes, although the Highland area does receive brief attention. The commissioners visited the parishes of Abernethy, Auchterarder, Auchtergaven, Caputh, Collace, Dron, Dunbarney, Errol, Fortingall, Inchtuthie, Kilspindie, Kinfauns, Kinnaird, Longforgan, Methven, Moneydie, Monzievaird and Strowan, Muthill, Redgorton, St Madoes, St Martins and Scone, and sought the views of local landowners or occupiers, of parish ministers and of school teachers, but not, unfortunately, those of the children themselves. From this information, it is possible to establish the ages at which children first began to be employed in agricultural work; at which times of the year they would normally be employed; what types of jobs they carried out and whether or not any of the above differed according to gender. This source also has the added advantage of revealing the

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<sup>51</sup> Referred to throughout this thesis as *Fourth Report*. The relevant Perthshire material is contained in *Parliamentary Papers* 1870 (c221) Vol xiii.

different attitudes of various members of the community towards the employment of children, the effects on education provision, and the suggested remedies to these problems offered by various community members.

### Age of Children Entering Agricultural Employment

There was no significant difference in the age at which boys and girls began to be employed on a casual basis within farm work in Perthshire. Of the 34 responses which made comment on the usual starting age, 82.3% suggested that boys and girls began at the same age. Of the remaining 17.7% which did differentiate, most respondents said that boys began to work before girls: only one response (2.9%) claimed that girls might begin at an earlier age than boys. The actual age at which children began to undertake employment varied from eight to fourteen years, although the most common starting age was ten years for both boys and girls. The results are detailed in Table 2.1 below. The figures are expressed as a percentage of the 34 responses from the above listed parishes which made any comment on the starting age of children.

**Table 2.1**  
*Starting Ages of Boys and Girls in Agricultural Employment in Perthshire, 1867*

Starting Age	% (of positive responses)
Boys and Girls 8 Years	5.9
Boys and Girls 9 Years	2.9
Boys and Girls 10 Years	29.4
Boys and Girls 11 Years	5.9
Boys and Girls 12 Years	20.6
Boys and Girls 13 Years	8.8
Boys and Girls 14 Years	8.8
Boys 10 Years, Girls 12 Years	2.9
Boys 12 Years, Girls 14 Years	8.8
Boys 13 Years, Girls 12-14 Years	2.9
Boys 14 Years, Girls 15 Years	2.9



Analysis of these figures suggests three main conclusions:

- Over 80% of informants agreed that boys and girls began farm work at the same age.
- The most common starting age for both boys and girls was ten years.
- Children were not engaged under eight years of age.

There seems to have been no particular link between geographical location and the age at which children first began to be employed in agriculture in Perthshire. Indeed, the evidence is somewhat contradictory in that different witnesses from the same parish sometimes gave conflicting accounts for the usual age at which children began casual employment. The parish of Errol in the Carse of Gowrie is a case in point. A local landowner, one John Murray Drummond, asserted that boys were never employed on farms before the age of thirteen and girls did not begin until between the ages of twelve and fourteen (*Fourth Report* xiii: 72). A local schoolmaster, however, suggested that boys in the area began work on farms from twelve to fourteen years and girls from the age of fifteen, while the parish minister reported that both boys and girls often began farm work as young as ten years old (*ibid.*). It is unclear as to why such a discrepancy should arise in the evidence: perhaps Drummond was referring to a policy he may have adopted on his own estate, while some witnesses may have only included those who worked on a regular or full time basis while others included those children who only laboured at the busiest periods of the year. Indeed, the employment situation regarding children was often rather complex and may well have brought much confusion to the witnesses, as is revealed within the evidence of George Muirhead, an occupier from the parish of Kilspindie:

Boys are generally employed at about 12 or 13 years of age, seldom below the first, and then only to 'scare' a field between the sowing and 'brairding' of the seed. When regularly employed they are engaged for 12 months at the regular hiring markets. Before obtaining a regular hiring they are employed at weekly wages in Spring in scaring birds and planting potatoes; in summer in thinning and hoeing turnips, hoeing potato drills, and attending to cows and young cattle when out at grass;



in Autumn chiefly a few days potato lifting; in Winter topping and tailing turnips. ... Girls are employed at the same occupations as boys, perhaps not to such an extent in herding. (ibid.: 76)

The type of work being carried out, then, differed little between boys and girls according to this particular witness, and indeed this is generally corroborated elsewhere in this evidence. Occasionally, an informant suggests that some girls stayed at home to look after the younger children while their mothers went out to work in the fields, but there is no evidence here to suggest that this was normal practice. On the whole, girls tended to undertake the same tasks as boys: herding, gathering stones and weeds, hoeing and cleaning crops, making sheaves at harvest time, pulling turnips, gathering potatoes, spreading dung, peeling bark - generally the more mundane jobs around the *fermtouns* which did not require too great a level of skill or experience to carry out to a high standard.

### *Attitudes to Child Labour*

There is no suggestion within this body of evidence that while working, children were treated any differently to their elders in terms of their conditions. Robert Elliot, an occupier from Kilspindie, informed the Commission that men, women and children all worked the same hours - ten per day in summer and during the harvest period. However, few women and almost no children worked in the fields or around the farm in winter. Elliot considered all his labourers to be equal, no matter their age or sex, and he was quick to point out that there was

... no ill-treatment whatever, they are strong and healthy, as a rule, and I see no other labourers more happy and contented than the agricultural labourers in this district. (ibid.: 76)

This farmer saw no harm in his practice of employing children on his land and indeed was vociferous in his condemnation of the suggestion that legal impediments should be placed in the way of this:

To restrict the employment of females or children in agriculture in any way in this district, or anywhere where I have occupied land in Scotland

would, I consider, be a most injudicious step, hurtful and injurious alike to the employed and the employer, and most uncalled for. (ibid.)

It is of course of little surprise that the employers should seek to defend their policies in relation to the employment of children, for minors were an important link in the local workforce and at minimal cost to the farmers.<sup>52</sup> Most dismissed the suggestion that such hard physical labour at an early age was damaging and some, such as Sir Robert Menzies, tried to present themselves as philanthropists, claiming that the children who were employed greatly benefited from the experience:

I employed a number of boys and girls, some of them quite young, to help in planting trees for six weeks during last spring, and their health was greatly improved by the process. (ibid.: 67)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the clergy tended to be the section of the local community who voiced the strongest objections to the employment of young children in farm work. While some were concerned that education standards were suffering, most emphasised instead their view that such work was harmful to the moral health of the children. Joseph Wilson, the Free Church minister of Abernethy parish, believed that while fieldwork was not necessarily in itself unfavourable to moral well-being, 'the language employed while at work has often a corrupting influence' (ibid.: 69). He saw no easy solutions, however, as during certain periods of the year

... females and children cannot be dispensed with, unless we cure one evil by creating another by bringing labourers into the district to live together in bothies. (ibid.)

The Rev. Mr Marshall of Caputh parish agreed with his Abernethy colleague that field work for children was not conducive to the development of strong moral character:

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<sup>52</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, daily wage rates for children in agricultural employment in Scotland were around 30% of the adult male rate (Levitt and Smout 1979: 79).

There can be no doubt that the effect of young men and young women working much in the fields together is hurtful to morality. (ibid.)

The Rev. Mr Davidson of Kinfauns summed up the concerns of many when he commented that the schools were generally taken advantage of, but that

At the same time it is evident that there is a struggle between two motives: the desire of wages and of instruction ... (ibid.: 81)

This conflict was generally recognised and understood by most of those interviewed by the commissioners in 1867, for those in positions of local authority were well aware of the economic importance of child labour within the family, and realised that without this additional household income life would have been very much harder for many, and indeed unsustainable for some. Teachers, for instance, tended to be quite realistic when expressing their views on how they thought legislation could be improved in order to encourage parents to take better advantage of the educational opportunities available to their children. Many argued that a modified version of the Printworks Act could be applied successfully to school attendance in rural areas. The principle behind this idea was that children could only be excused school during the busy periods of the farming year if they had attended classes for a minimum number of days during the previous six month period. This idea attracted much more teacher support than the other course of action which was being suggested at this time, namely the introduction of the principles contained within the Factory Act of 1863 whereby children would have to spend half of each week day at school and half working on the farm if desired. Many thought this to be wholly impractical and unworkable and the *Fourth Report* clearly shows that this attracted little local Perthshire support.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The model of the Factory Act was clearly to the forefront of the Commissioners' minds at the outset of their enquiry, for the main purpose of their research was to ascertain 'to what extent, and with what modifications, the principles of the Factory Acts can be adopted for the regulation of such employment, and especially with a view to the better education of such children' (*Fourth Report* 1867: 1).

It is a matter of regret that the witnesses selected and interviewed by the commissioners in 1867 did not include a larger number of representatives from within the labouring classes. Nonetheless, their voices are not completely absent, and the comments of the few who were approached provide a very interesting window upon the sorts of attitudes and aspirations which they held regarding the schooling of their children. The sample is far too small to enable us to talk confidently of the 'typical' attitude of these parents, if indeed such a consensus existed, but the words of one ploughman's wife from Kinfauns parish are certainly worth consideration:

I have seven children, one at home, four at school, one of 16 years a fisherman, and one of 18 years a ploughman in a bothy. When we lived in Methven we sent the children very early to school, it kept them off the street: we used to pay there 6d a month for the youngest and 1s a month for each of the three bigger ones. When they are at the school my husband hearkens them their lessons every night to see that they have them. I think they would be long in learning if we didn't examine them at home. We do our endeavour to make them learn at home. It depends on their learning when they leave school, if they're good scholars they can leave the earlier. A ploughman isn't able to give a great education to his children, but we give them as much as we can. (ibid.: 82)

These parents obviously took a certain pride in being able to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded their children, and were certainly keen for them to perform well in class. Nonetheless, the economic undertones are plain to see in this narrative. There are no 'lad o pairts' aspirations here, for the main advantage of having sons and daughters who were good scholars was that it allowed them to leave school early, and thus (it is implied) get out to work at a young age in order to supplement the household income.

While this is one of the rare voices heard from this sector of the population, the evidence of other witnesses does tend to indicate that this desire of parents to see their children receive a strong basic education was not untypical within the county at this time. Fletcher N Menzies, Secretary to the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and an occupier in the Breadalbane area

asserted that education was so eagerly sought after by the parents that he saw no need for the introduction of legislation to bring in compulsory school attendance (ibid.: 67). The parochial school master in Kinfauns praised parents for their willingness to buy books which allowed their children to study at home, although he also pointed out that the small and cramped conditions of the labourers' houses made home study very difficult. In Methven, according to a local landowner, the children of the parish were receiving a fair education there despite the temptation of the extra earnings which could be made from agricultural work. There was, however, a large Irish catholic population in this district, very few of whom were receiving any formal education at all (ibid.: 85). While some witnesses - primarily school teachers - did favour the introduction of some degree of legal compulsion for children to attend school for a minimum period each year, the general feeling which comes through strongly in this body of evidence from 1867 was that each community could and should be left to look after its own affairs. There is a certain flavour of paternalism in the attitudes of many of the landowners and employers and local networking and 'string pulling' remained a force to be reckoned with.

A clear indication of this at work is contained within the evidence from the parish of Monzievaird and Strowan in the south west of the county. The local school master, Mr McRostie, unusually for his profession, did not favour any legal changes regarding school attendance. If he felt it necessary, he said, he would ask the local landowner to speak to any worker on his estate who was neglecting his children's education. He had only had to do this once, however (ibid.: 87). We can only guess as to the nature of the tactics employed by this landowner in order to remedy the situation, but whether it involved the stick or the carrot it nonetheless indicates the desire articulated by many to seek local solutions for what were seen to be localised problems. Few were keen to see such power centralised on the statute book, and so many must have been disappointed to say the least when the Education Act of 1872 finally brought the



teachers their wish and introduced the principle of compulsory school attendance for the first time.

To what extent did the 1872 Act alter the pattern of child labour involvement in Perthshire agriculture? One useful starting point in any search for the answer to this question is the Decennial Census returns, for these provide information on the employment of boys and girls under fifteen years of age. Tables 2.2 to 2.9 below summarise these data for the period from 1861 to 1891 inclusive.

**Table 2.2**  
*Employment of boys in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1861*

Specialisation	Number of boys under 15yrs	% of total males in speciality
Farmer's male relative	0	0.0
Agric. labourer (outdoor)	148	4.7
Ploughman (outdoor)	33	1.2
Cattleman (outdoor)	56	38.4
Shepherd (outdoor)	6	1.1
Ploughman (indoor)	52	2.7
Cattleman (indoor)	300	71.4
Shepherd (indoor)	25	7.8
Farm servant (indoor)	287	30.3
Agric. student & others	0	0.0

**Table 2.3**  
*Employment of girls in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1861*

Specialisation	Number of girls under 15 years	Girls as % of total females
Farmer / grazier's relative	0	0.0
Agric. labourer (outdoor)	112	6.2
Farm servant (indoor)	69	5.5

**Table 2.4***Employment of boys in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1871*

Specialisation	No. of boys under 15 years	Boys as % of total males
Land proprietor	1	0.9
Farmer, grazier	1	0.0
Agric. labourer (outdoor)	266	4.36
Shepherd (outdoor)	8	1.2
Farm servant (indoor)	433	18.1
Farmer's relative	1172	44.1
Dependants (not relatives of farmer)	2666	56.5

**Table 2.5***Employment of girls in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1871*

Specialisation	No. of girls under 15 years	Girls as % of total females
Agric. labourer (outdoor)	42	3.6
Shepherd (outdoor)	0	0.0
Farm servant (indoor)	120	9.1
Farmer's relative	1238	31.6
Dependants (not relatives of farmer)	2520	28.0

**Table 2.6***Employment of boys in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1881*

Specialisation	No. of boys under 15 years	Boys as % of total males
Farmer / grazier	0	0.0
Farmer's relative	0	0.0
Agric. labourer / farm servant	354	5.6
Shepherd	0	0.0
Agric. student / pupil	1	5.9

**Table 2.7***Employment of girls in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1881<sup>54</sup>*

Specialisation	No. of girls under 15 years	Girls as % of total females
Farmer / grazier	0	0.0
Agric. labourer / farm servant	195	5.3

<sup>54</sup> These two categories were the only figures given in this year for females in agriculture.

**Table 2.8***Employment of boys in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1891*

Specialisation	No. of boys under 15 years	Boys as % of total males
Farmer / grazier	0	0.0
Farmer's relative	0	0.0
Agric. labourer / farm servant	355	6.8
Shepherd	12	1.5

**Table 2.9***Employment of girls in agriculture by specialisation, Perthshire 1891*

Specialisation	No. of girls under 15 years	Girls as % of total females
Farmer / grazier	0	0.0
Agric. labourer / farm servant	41	4.5
Shepherd	0	0.0

Unfortunately, the inconsistencies of Census design within this sample, particularly as regards the occupational categories used, pose certain difficulties when attempting a diachronic comparative analysis of this material<sup>55</sup>. Nonetheless, the figures do appear to suggest that the introduction of compulsory school attendance from 1872 may well have reduced the opportunities for children to be engaged in farm work, for the heavy reliance which was being placed upon the labour of children of both sexes in 1861 and 1871 for certain agricultural tasks had been radically reduced by the 1880s. In 1871, 18.1% of male and 9.1% of female indoor farm servants were under 15 years of age, while a decade later the corresponding figures had fallen to 5.6% and 5.3% respectively. There is, however, strong evidence to suggest that the reliance upon children had already begun to decline before 1872, especially as regards the use of boys as cattle herds. In 1861, 38.4% of cattlemen living within the farmhouse were under the age of fifteen, while the corresponding figure for outdoor cattlemen was as high as 71.4%. Once again, an absence of clarity regarding the definitions of employment categories clouds a fuller understanding

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<sup>55</sup> It is for this reason that tables 2.2 to 2.9 cannot be presented in a more condensed form.

of this data, for it is unclear whether these figures relate only to those in full employment or whether some of these boys would also have been attending school in between work sessions. Also, the category of *cattleman* does not appear after 1861, and it must be assumed that these employees had been subsumed into the *farm servant* and *farm labourer* categories. Whether or not this was indeed the case, the one fact which is certain is that by 1871, boys under the age of fifteen were no longer relied upon as the main source of labour for tending to the Perthshire cattle.

Parish school log books, several of which are held in the local archives within the A. K. Bell Library in Perth, constitute another very useful source of both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the impact of farm work upon the education of Perthshire children. Compiled of course by the school teachers, they tend on the whole to corroborate the findings of the 1867 Royal Commissioners as outlined above, but provide a more focused account of the attendance patterns together with explanatory notes regarding any fluctuations.

The logs for five parish schools - Aberdalgie, Ballintuim, Dull, Kinclaven and Kinfauns - were examined, as these were among the few held by the library for which the entries begin prior to 1872. All of these include commentaries on the reasons for drops in attendance from time to time. Occasionally it was illness which was to blame, as was the case in Kinclaven in 1875 when a whooping cough epidemic struck in the parish, but more often it was a more predictable cause - farm work - which was keeping many of the children from attending school. The following provide a sample of the entries which served to explain this:

November 1870:- Still no increase in attendance. The work at this part of the school year is very disheartening. The parents, who mostly have small farms, find the services of even the youngest children who are of an age to travel to school, of some benefit, and prefer those small services to instruction and education of the children. (Kinclaven, AKB: CC1 5/7/61)

May 1871:- The attendance only 20. The drain upon the school by parents and employers of agricultural labour has been augmented by the demand for boys and girls to assist in oak peeling. (ibid.)

May 1872:- The attendance will be lower owing to the older scholars being required for fieldwork. Several are at the oak peeling, etc. (ibid.)

April 17th 1874:- One boy of fourteen and one girl of twelve and a half years leave school today for field labour. (ibid.)

May 1874:- The elder scholars are now engaged at work. And a number of those under 13 are kept at home to herd or nurse or to work at the oak peeling which has now commenced. (ibid.)

May 14th 1875:- Attendance even lower than that of last week. 2 of those engaged in potato planting have returned but others have left to work at the oak peeling. (ibid.)

June 11th 1875:- The oak peelers have all returned to school, but they have all fallen behind the others in their classes. (ibid.)

June 1865:- Small attendance (peat cutting). Master gave tomorrow a holiday as he is to get peats cut. (Dull, AKB CC1 5/7/33)

March 22 1869:- Attendance reduced today by a ploughing match in the neighbourhood. (ibid.)

May 1874:- Attendance slightly reduced this week on account of planting potatoes in the fields. (ibid.)

July 14th 1873:- Attendance rather poor, children being kept at home, their parents being at the turnip fields. (Kinfauns, AKB CC1 5/7/64)

As these comments clearly indicate, a range of employment forms were responsible for school absences. While many masters simply blamed 'fieldwork', some were more precise, citing bark peeling, potato planting and lifting, turnip thinning, peat cutting and even a ploughing match as the causes of non-attendance. In Aberdalgie, (AKB CC1 5/7/1) estate sporting pursuits were providing employment for the local boys who were frequently engaged in 'beating out the game', a task which by the 1890s was also a major attraction for



boys in Dull parish (AKB CC1 5/7/33). In some cases it seems to have been the parents who were employed in various tasks, with the children being kept from school presumably to look after younger children in their parents' absence. Indeed, it was not always the children who were absent from school, as the Dull holiday on account of the master's peat cutting activities clearly indicates!<sup>56</sup>

As the extracts above show, absence from school for farm work was by no means unknown even after the 1872 Act came into force. However, it does appear that the frequency of comments of this nature did indeed decrease from that date, and more care seems to have been taken by many masters and the newly formed school boards to seek explanations for absences. The logs make regular mention of visits from the 'compulsory officer' who followed up cases of absence:

School Board compulsory officer called today. Two brothers absent at turnip planting. Asked him to write to father, who is ill, stating that if his case is necessitous he must apply for exemption certificate. (ibid.)

The need for parents and guardians to take the new laws seriously seems to have filtered through gradually. In January 1874, a note sent to the Kinfauns master by one guardian was seen to be significant enough for inclusion in the log:

Please excuse Jessie and don't put her to the bottom if late, as I detained her. I also kept George Stewart and John Davidson for a little. (AKB CC1 5/7/64)

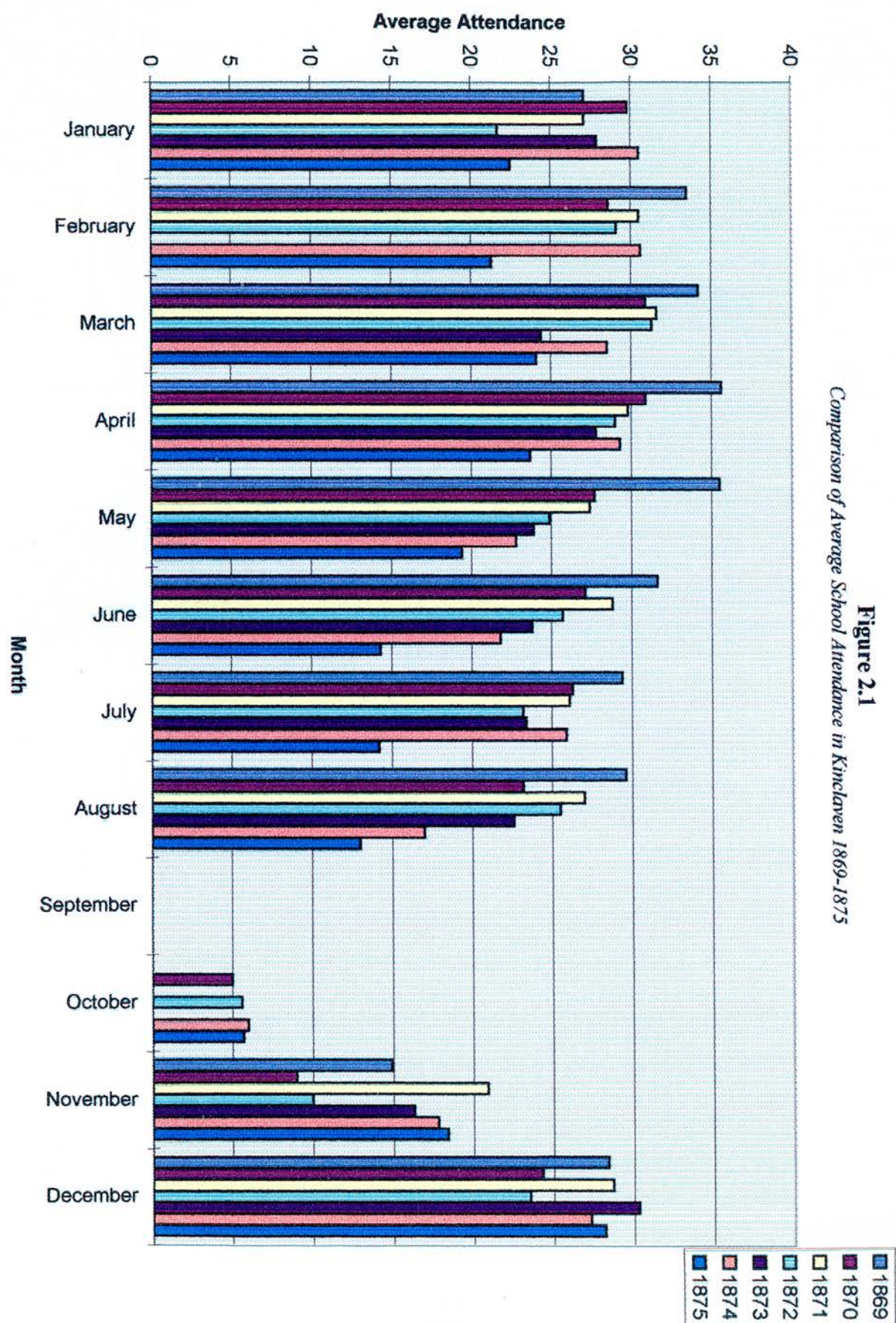
The masters were also obliged to include a summary of the inspector's annual report within their logs, together with a note on the examination performance of the classes, a practice which provides a crude and yet useful guide to educational standards at localised level. Based on the material within the logs consulted, there is no strong evidence to suggest that standards improved as a consequence of the compulsory attendance principle introduced in the 1872 Act. Certainly

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<sup>56</sup> It is perhaps of little surprise that this master was reprimanded for poor performance in 1868 and warned that if things did not improve he would be removed from his position (AKB CC1 5/7/33).

some schools, notably Kinclaven and Dull, did show signs of improved student performance by the second half of the 1870s: in Kinclaven, the inspections for the early years of that decade revealed weaknesses in standards of grammar, dictation and arithmetic, while by 1879 standards in all subjects were said to be high and the school was 'in a very fair state of efficiency' (AKB CC1 5/7/61). However, there are indications within this body of evidence that factors other than pupil attendance rates influenced educational standards. The log for Aberdalgie, for instance, reveals that the inspectors' reports became increasingly critical through the 1870s with standards in all areas showing a downward trend there. The school board placed the blame for this firmly upon the master, Thomas Doig, who was dismissed on the grounds of inefficiency in 1877 under section 60 (2) of the Education Act (*ibid.*).

While the qualitative material contained within these nineteenth century school log books certainly provides at least a glimpse of the extent to which agricultural work continued to lure some children away from the classroom, a quantitative analysis of school attendance patterns for one parish has also been undertaken. Of the logs consulted, only the entries for Kinclaven parish are consistently detailed enough to allow for a meaningful graphic representation to be made. The weekly attendance figures from January 1869 to December 1875 were noted, and from this monthly averages were calculated. The results are presented in Figure 2.1 below.





The bar chart reveals that there is no indication that attendance levels improved as a result of the compulsion introduced in the 1872 Act. Indeed, the latest year examined, 1875, witnessed the lowest attendance rates of all those surveyed and in general, the trend was downward as the years progressed. Several unknown factors have not been taken into account here however, for the *potential* number of pupils in any given year is not known, and it may be that the downward trend indicates an outward population movement from the area itself.<sup>57</sup>

What is very clear, though, is the seasonal pattern of attendance, which relates very closely to the peak seasonal labour requirements of the farming calendar. The school closed each September, the main harvest period, and as the masters' complaints outlined above reveal, pupils were very slow to return to school thereafter, with the October potato harvest serving to keep them in the fields until well into November. While winter attendance was generally relatively good, it tended to be suppressed slightly by poor weather, with the peaks of attendance consistently being achieved between February and May in each year surveyed. There then followed a gradual but perceptible downward trend through the summer months leading up to the closure each September. Within this parish at least, this pattern remained completely unaffected by the stipulations of the 1872 Act.

As tables 2.8 and 2.9 above clearly indicate, however, reliance upon child labour did begin to fall within Perthshire by the final decade of the nineteenth century, a trend which seems to have been shared by most counties within Scotland (Levitt and Smout 1979: 78). A combination of higher male wage rates (thus reducing the need for wives and children of farm servants and labourers to work to supplement family incomes), increasing adoption of labour-saving technology,

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<sup>57</sup> There was certainly a downward trend in the total population of Kinclaven during the second half of the nineteenth century. Between 1861 and 1871 the figure fell by 22.4% (Census of Scotland 1861, 1871 and 1881).

and changing social attitudes towards the use of both women and children for hard labour, served to discourage agricultural employers from engaging minors. Nonetheless, oral testimony bears witness to the fact that for many children living in rural Scotland during the twentieth century, physical farm labour continued to play a central role in their early experiences of life (Jamieson and Toynbee 1992). The childhood experiences of a small selection of witnesses from Perthshire are considered in the final section of this chapter.

### **Women's Roles**

As Devine has demonstrated (1984a), adult women were also a very important link in the chain of agricultural labour within Scotland in the nineteenth century. His analysis of the 1871 Census Return reveals that of those persons enumerated as farm workers (grievances, agricultural labourers, shepherds and farm servants), 26% of the total were women (*ibid.* 98). Indeed, this figure is undoubtedly a conservative one, for it does not include wives and daughters of smaller farmers for whom family labour was essential, as they were not included within the defined categories upon which the census was based.

Devine asserts that between 1850 and 1914 women agricultural workers within Scotland could be categorised into four distinct groups:

- Regular and full-time employees
- Family Workers
- 'In-and-out' girls - their work was partly domestic but also involved field labour
- Part-time, seasonal or casual workers



Devine further divides his first grouping - regular and full-time workers - into those whose main duties involved dairy work, principally within the counties of Lanark, Dumbarton, Renfrew, Ayr and Wigton, and those who were mainly employed as outdoor field workers. According to Devine, the latter were largely located in the south-east counties of the Lothians, Berwickshire, Roxburghshire and Fife, where an arable emphasis and a tendency toward large farms combined to create a heavy demand for field labour. It was this group which formed the backbone of the 'bondager' tradition, whereby ploughmen were employed on condition that they supply a female worker too - a wife, daughter, or sister perhaps, or indeed any female at all who was fit for the job. In most cases the ploughman was expected to provide for her board and lodgings, receiving a compensatory allowance as part of his bargain. While dissatisfaction with this system through the second half of the nineteenth century led to its eventual demise, it clung on in places into the early years of the twentieth century and there is little doubt that the bondager, with her distinctive dress and bonnet, became a celebrated icon of southern Scottish rural identity and female working pride (ibid.; see also Robertson 1973).

While the bondager system *per se* was never adopted within Perthshire, there is certainly evidence to show that many male farm servants were only employed there on condition that they could provide female labour when required. Commissioner Culley's report on Perthshire for the 1867 *Fourth Report* enquiry, for instance, includes the following observation:

This girl lives in one of three or four cottages on the hillside at Rhynd, which Mr Drysdale holds with his farm, and lets to any family which will undertake to provide a female worker. These are very old cottages, by no means desirable dwellings, with very low mud and stone walls, and straw thatch; formerly crofter's cottages. (*Fourth Report*: 89)

The 'girl' referred to here was herself interviewed by Culley:

We get the house for finding a woman worker, and I do the work. At summer, we go out at six and a half o'clock, go on till eleven and a half, and begin again at one and a half o'clock and work till six and a half. We

have tea and loaf-bread, and butter at breakfast; broth of barley, vegetables, and bacon at dinner; and tea and bread and butter for supper. (ibid.)

For this woman, at least, the hours were certainly long, but the daily diet she describes compares very favourably with that of most agricultural workers of the period, and certainly has much greater variety and value than the monotonous menu of the bothy dwellers, as is discussed in Chapter Three below.

Culley was admirable in terms of his willingness to seek out the voice of the labourer, both male and female, during his investigative tour. One labourer's wife from the parish of Errol, who had herself been employed as a full time field worker in her younger day, saw this kind of work as being quite natural and acceptable, although her narrative reveals just a hint of the attitude which became very common towards the end of that century whereby it was said that women would be better suited to lighter, more 'feminine' forms of employment:

Married women like fine to work out when they can win, but I don't think farm work profits them much. I think the harm to their morals only comes to them that seek it. A good deal depends on the man that overlooks the women. (ibid.: 93)

John Kempe, a local labourer of sixty-six years of age, was certainly of the opinion that by that time there had been a drop in the standard of female labourer available for employment in the district of Errol - 'the women's no strong either now' - but this was very much in keeping with his views on the abilities of the current generation of servants in general:

The men are no near so strong as they used to be, with all their wages. They buy tea and white bread and fine clothes, and dinna stick to the meal and milk. They have ploughmen now would hardly have been sent to look after the cattle in my day. Some of their ploughmen can hardly toom their pokes. (ibid.) [empty their sacks]

The responses to Question 13 in the Poor Law Enquiry of 1843, as analysed above in relation to the employment of children, show that virtually every respondent from Perthshire claimed that women were employed in agriculture

within the local area.<sup>58</sup> This was corroborated some years later by Commissioner Culley, who reported that in his area of responsibility for the 1867 Royal Commission Enquiry, which included Perthshire, he found the employment of women in agriculture to be much more widespread and common than was the case in England, for example, and that all the lighter and many of the heavier tasks on the farm were carried out by females. Indeed, they represented a relatively cheap labour source for the employers, a fact which may have accounted for his estimate that on the arable farms in the district, the number of men and women employed was more or less equal.<sup>59</sup>

In Perthshire, women employed as full-time field workers were hired at feeling fairs in the same manner as their male colleagues and normally for either a period of six months or one year. These fairs were often the subject of reports within the local weekly press which reveal that nineteenth century employers were frequently on the lookout for 'good, stout women' for field work,<sup>60</sup> although female domestic servants were also in strong demand. By the latter decades of the century, however, there are strong indications that fewer Perthshire women were seeking outdoor agricultural employment, for the press reports make increasingly frequent reference to the fact that demand was greater than supply, a

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<sup>58</sup> 98.4% of respondents agreed that women were employed in agricultural work in their area of Perthshire, while 1.6% gave an ambiguous (but not negative) reply.

<sup>59</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, women agricultural workers in Scotland were generally paid around half the wage rate of their male counterparts, although this figure could fall to around 35% in parts of the western Highlands (Levitt and Smout 1979: 79). Indeed, this situation had remained unchanged since the 1790s (Morgan 1971). Although no close analysis of wage rates within Perthshire has been undertaken for this thesis, numerous local newspaper reports dating from the second half of the nineteenth century reveal that female wage rates at hiring fairs tended to remain at around 50% of those of second class ploughmen, and 35% - 40% of first class ploughmen. At the Martinmas fair in Aberfeldy in 1860, for instance, 1st class ploughmen were being offered from L20 - L24 per annum, 2nd class L18 - L19, halfplins (young male 'orra loons') from L4 - L8, and women L8 or L9. It would appear from the commentary that the women's wages were considered unusually generous due to a high demand for their labour, as the reporter remarked that 'wages were high, especially for women'. (Perthshire Courier, Nov 8th 1860)

<sup>60</sup> This phrase seems to have been a favourite and oft-quoted one within the Perthshire Courier in particular.

point which is corroborated by the evidence contained within the 1893-94 Royal Commission on Labour.<sup>61</sup> In Breadalbane, the main Perthshire focus of attention of this report, women were said to be engaged either by the year or half-year, although regular outdoor women workers were ‘scarcely heard of’ by this time (153). One farmer, Mr McDermid of Camusericht, remarked that ‘women are almost ungettable; we must go to the Western Islands for them’ and estimated that since around 1870, the supply of women labourers had fallen by around 60% to 80% (ibid.: 152). This may well help to account for the aforementioned tendency for employers to show an ‘unofficial’ preference for employing male servants who could also provide a female worker when required.<sup>62</sup>

While full time female outdoor workers were certainly being hired in Perthshire during the nineteenth century, the other categories of women agricultural workers identified by Devine were also represented there, as tables 2.10 and 2.11 below reveal.

**Table 2.10**

*Percentage distribution of female agricultural workers by speciality, Perthshire 1861*

Specialisation	Number	%
Land proprietor	60	0.8
Farmer / grazier	274	3.8
Farmer / grazier’s wife	1893	26.5
Farmer / grazier’s other relatives	1850	25.9
Agric. labourer (outdoor)	1805	25.3
Farm servant (indoor)	1247	17.4
Feuar	21	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7150</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>61</sup> See the Report by Mr R Hunter Pringle, ‘The Agricultural Labourer: Scotland’ Parliamentary Papers Vol xxxvi 1893-94.

<sup>62</sup> A discussion of preferences shown by employers for employing either married or unmarried male servants is contained in Chapter Three below.

**Table 2.11***Percentage distribution of male and female agricultural workers by speciality, Perthshire 1911*

<b>Specialisation</b>	<b>Male %</b>	<b>Female %</b>
Farmer /grazier	18.9	13.6
Farmer's / grazier's relatives	7.3	26.5
Crofter	2.1	4.9
Crofter's relatives	0.3	2.8
Grieve / foreman	6.0	0.0
Shepherd	6.8	0.3
Agric. labourer / farm servant (cattle)	7.9	22.2
Agric. labourer / farm servant (horses)	25.4	0.6
Agric. labourer / farm servant (unspecified)	12.4	26.6
Forester / woodman	3.9	0.5
Nurseryman, seedsman, florist	0.7	0.3
Market gardener	1.6	0.8
Other gardener (not domestic)	3.9	0.2
Others	2.9	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>99.9</b>

'Family labour' - wives and other relatives of the farmers - accounted for over half of the total number of female agricultural employees in the county in 1861, labourers accounted for around a quarter, while farm servants who lived within the farmhouse made up the majority of the remainder at 17.4%. Most of the latter category would have been 'in-and-out girls', being required to undertake whatever duties were asked of them, both indoors and outside.<sup>63</sup> By 1911, however, the situation had altered, although the use of different employment categories minimises our ability to make direct comparisons. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that there had been a major decline in the amount of family female labour that was being utilised by that period, with the figure having fallen to just a little over a quarter of women employed. Almost half of the total were classed as 'agricultural labourers and farm servants' many of whom were involved

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<sup>63</sup> The naming of the category as 'Farm servant (indoor)' is slightly misleading. The term 'indoor' simply refers to the fact that they were provided with accommodation on the farm, probably within the farmhouse itself, rather than living in homes of their own.



specifically with cattle (most likely in dairy-related work). The other notable change between 1861 and 1911 was the 10% increase in the proportion of women who ran their own tenanted farms, a sign, perhaps, that by then proprietors were more likely to consider women as suitable tenants in their own right.

Although the Census Returns showed a marked decline in the amount of female family labour being utilised within Perthshire by the dawn of the twentieth century, oral testimony tends to suggest that it actually remained very important within the context of individual household units, as indeed did the labour of children. These issues are further explored within the short case study presented below.

### **A Farming Family - 'The Wests'.**

The fact that many members of my own extended paternal family have been involved in farm labouring in and around Perthshire for several generations provides an ideal context for a short case study to be conducted which looks at the family experience of the farming life mode during the twentieth century. This section is therefore based upon my own participant observation, informal chats, archive-based genealogical searches and a series of semi-structured tape recorded interviews with selected family members.

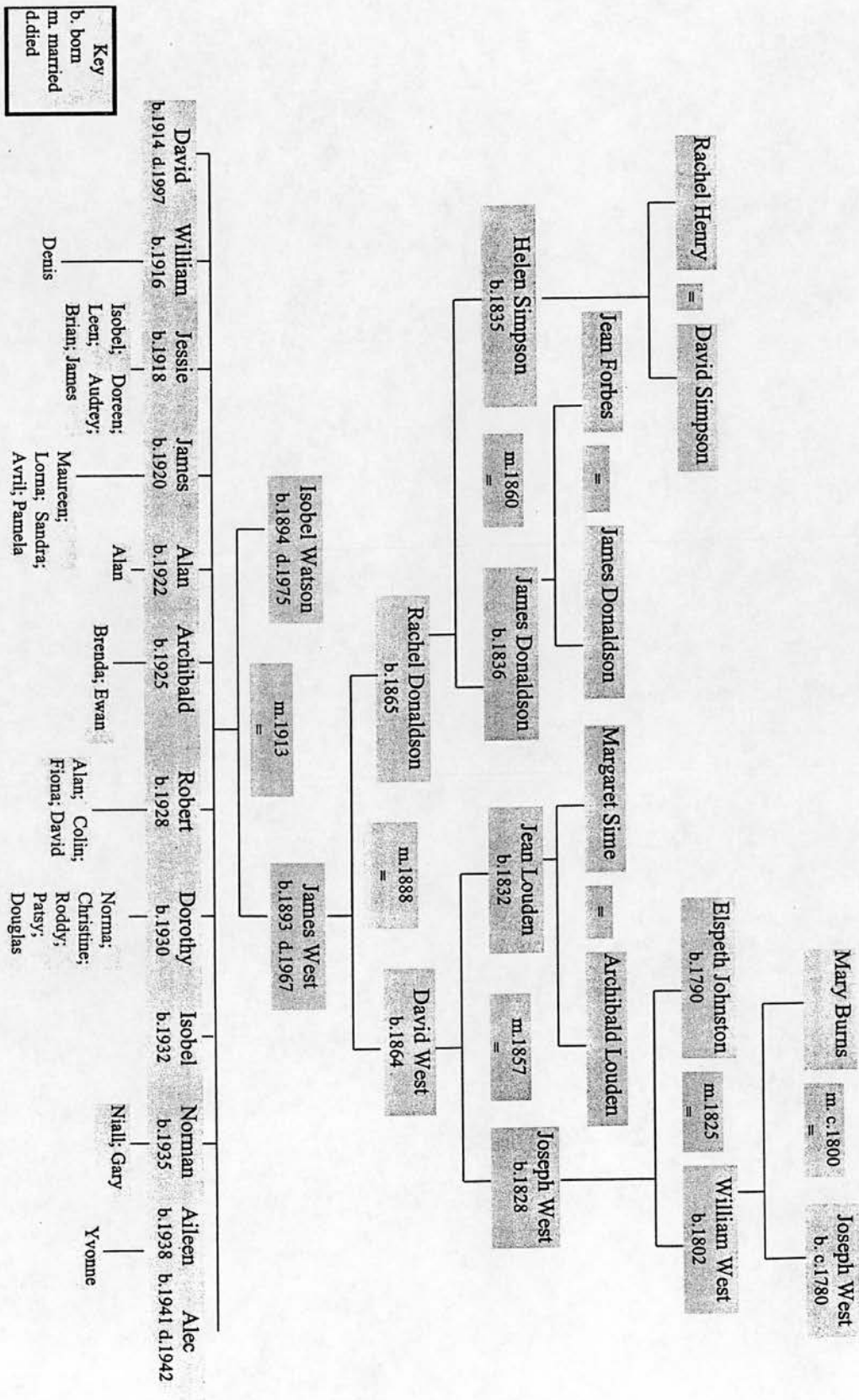
#### *Genealogy*

Figure 2.2 sets out the 'family tree' of my West ancestors stretching back to the late eighteenth century. The earliest member traced was Joseph West, a ship's carpenter from the Cults area of Fife, who was probably born sometime before 1780 (having married, and fathered a son by 1802). The farming connection begins with his son, William, a ploughman, who married Elspeth Johnston (some twelve years his senior) at Pitlessie in Fife in 1825. William would have belonged

to one of the first generations of specialised horsemen to emerge as a consequence of the newly 'improved' forms of agriculture, and remained in that profession until his death in 1861. Elspeth died in 1857, but William was not slow to re-marry, taking Elizabeth Neilson for his new wife before the year was out.

William and Elspeth's son, Joseph, was born in 1828 in Dairsie in Fife, carrying on in his father's footsteps as an agricultural labourer, and marrying Jean Sime Loudon at Cults in 1857 (see Photograph 2.a). Jean was the daughter of Margaret Sime and Archibald Loudon, a linen weaver. It was the next West generation, in the form of Joseph and Jean's son, David, who began the Perthshire connection which has lasted down to the present day. Although born in Fife at Kettle in 1864, by the time David married in 1888 he was working as a coachman and farm servant on the rich soils of the Carse of Gowrie. His bride was Rachel Donaldson, a handloom weaver from Bendochy near Coupar Angus with strong local roots (Photographs 2.b and 2.c). Rachel's father, James, was a ploughman at Coupar Angus and the son of a local weaver, also James. Her mother, Helen Simpson, was also of local parents: David Simpson was a farm labourer near Kettins who married Rachel Henry sometime before Helen's birth in 1835. David West and Rachel Donaldson reared their family in the *fermtouns* around Coupar Angus and Kinclaven near the banks of the Tay in the years spanning the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. James, their eldest surviving son (my grandfather), was born in 1893, the first child, Joseph, having died soon after birth. Will, Jean, Rachel, Jack and Helen completed the family. David worked his way up to grieve on the mains farm at Airtully, a hamlet within Kinclaven parish just across the Tay from the Mackenzie lands at Delvine. James was destined to follow in his father's footsteps, working under him as second, and then first ploughman, before succeeding him as grieve on his father's retirement.

**Figure 2.2**  
West Family Genealogy





**Photograph 2.a**  
*Joseph West and Jean Sime Loudon, c.1890*  
*West Family Collection*





**Photograph 2.b**  
*David West and Rachel Donaldson, c. 1890*  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 2.c**  
*David West and Rachel Donaldson, c. 1945*  
*West Family Collection*





**Photograph 2.d**

*A Wedding at Coupar Angus, c. 1914*

James West and Isobel Watson are seated front row, second couple from left, and Dave MacDonald is seated front row, far right.

*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 2.e**

*James West and Isobel Watson, c. 1964*

*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 2.f**  
*Dave Watson and Jessie Gracie, c. 1900*  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 2.g**  
*West Family, 1990*  
 Back Row From Left: Arch, Will, Norman, Bert, Alan, Jim  
 Front Row: Isobel, Jessie, Dave, Dorothy, Aileen  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 2.h**  
*Norman West, Balnabeggan, c. 1945*  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 2.i**  
*Norman West, Balnabeggan, c. 1950*  
*West Family Collection*



James West married Isobel Watson, my grandmother, in 1913 (Photographs 2.d and 2.e). Isobel had been born at Easterbank, near Forfar, Angus in 1894, eldest daughter of David Watson and Jessie Gracie. Dave Watson was employed as a farm servant and later a grieve on farms on either side of the Perthshire / Angus border, where Isobel was soon joined by two brothers and three sisters. Like many grieves of his day, Dave Watson was an uncompromising disciplinarian who took immense pride in his work and who was able to command the respect of all around him, including his grandchildren (Photograph 2.f):

### **CD Track 1**

... you had to be very much on yer toes wi the grandparents. He wasnie sweirt tae tak oot the belt, and it wasnie yon kind you held yer hand oot for! Oh aye. It had to be just so so. Bed at a certain time and don't go tae the table until you was asked an say a yer manners and one thing and anither, ye know. Ye just had to be on the ball a the time. ... Grandfather was grieve on Kinpurnie. A staunch man that never did nothin else but attend tae his garden and did his work and went tae his bed at nine o'clock every night, up in the mornin at five o'clock, roon tae the bothy and chapped up the bothy lads, away down tae the steadin. Cam hame at denner time, had his dinner, did his wee bits o chores that he had tae dae - maybe there was a pig you see - then he'd go away down half and oor before yokin time, and he lay doon in a stall and had forty winks afore startin time. Every day in life. ... You was never allowed down near the steadin when he was about. He chased ye for your life. A great man he was really. (Will West, SA 1988.19)

Farm labouring was certainly in the Gracie blood too, for Jessie's father John, born in 1834, and grandfather (whose birth date has not been traced but who may well have witnessed the arrival of the nineteenth century) were both employed as agricultural labourers in Perthshire and Angus.

Following their marriage in 1913, James West and Isobel Watson began their family together in 1914 with the arrival of Dave, the first of twelve children whose births spanned some twenty-seven years. Isobel bore a total of eight boys and four girls - my father, my uncles and my aunts - upon whose memories and experiences much of the oral material contained within this study is based

(Photograph 3.g). The youngest, Alec, died in infancy, and Dave died in 1997 after a lifetime spent in Perthshire farming. Of this generation, only Alan, Norman and Aileen did not continue within a farming life mode into adulthood, although Alan did take a servant's fee for a year on leaving school before taking up an apprenticeship as a blacksmith. It is perhaps indicative of the changing role of agriculture within the Perthshire economy in the post World War Two period, that of the 27 members of the next 'West' generation - my own - only two have continued the farming or farm labouring tradition.

### *Life at Airntully*

The hamlet or *toun* of Airntully was part of the Murthly Estates owned by the Stewart-Fotheringham family who also owned the Grandtully Estate near Strathtay in Highland Perthshire. Sited on the relatively rich and artificially-drained haugh lands on the west banks of the Tay some eight miles north of Perth, Airntully farm was tenanted by Mr Cree, a 'gentleman' farmer who did not involve himself with the practical work of the farm, preferring to leave this to his grieve.<sup>64</sup> At 350 arable acres, Airntully was fairly large within the local context, offering employment to four ploughmen, a cattleman and an 'orra laddie' who drove a single horse and learned his trade by carrying out the odd jobs around the farm. Unusually for the area, there was no bothy at Airntully, with Mr Cree employing married men who were provided with a small cottage on site for themselves and their families.

James and Isobel West moved into one of the farm cottages in Airntully in 1918 when James was fee'd there as first ploughman.<sup>65</sup> As was the case with the five or six other cottages there, the West's home had a small croft or pendicle

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<sup>64</sup> Although the Wests claimed that Mr Cree was 'around, watchin, keekin .... keekin around trees and that, to see' (SC 1986.17).

<sup>65</sup> He had previously worked there as second ploughman, before taking a fee in Abernyste for a couple of years, before returning to work under his father again at Airntully.



attached which the family could work for their own subsistence or profit. This was common practice in parts of Lowland Perthshire, and is one of the reasons why family labour was of such great importance to individual household economies, and greatly underestimated in official statistics such as the Decennial Census returns. As is discussed below, the pendicle system was of great importance to many of the workers, and was the principal reason why the West children, and indeed countless others like them, were introduced to the skills and responsibilities of the farming lifestyle at such a young age.

At first, with only Dave, Will and Jessie to provide for, conditions within the home were comfortable, but as more children arrived, space began to get tight. However, with the elder boys moving out to take fees on other farms in the neighbourhood on leaving school at fourteen, there were rarely more than half a dozen of the children living at home at the same time, making the rearing of twelve children a practical possibility within a small farm cottage:

JR: How big was the house, Bill?

WW: It wisnae very big. It wis only a kitchen and a room - a small kitchen and two rooms. That wis the way it wis.

JR: And in one of these rooms, how many people lived - or how many people slept?

WW: Well ye had tae have two beds in it for a start, that wis where a' the bairns slept.

DM: Head to toe?

WW: Head tae toe. But by the time that we grew up and went away out tae work on farms, we couldnie get home at the weekends, because there wis nowhere tae sleep. Until such times as the sanitary inspector came along, and they renovated the whole place and added another room.

DD: So you had three bedrooms by that time?

WW: Three bedrooms. (Heartland FM, March 1995)

On his retiral as grieve, David West moved to the cattleman's position on Airntully for a short time, before ending his working days there doing odd jobs around the farm. His wife, Rachel, kept a small shop on their pendicle, selling groceries, sweets and various other goods to the other families around the

hamlet. The shop was a favourite meeting place for the West children, and their grandmother's house was the regular gathering spot for all the family on a Sunday evening.

### *Divisions of Labour*

The family croft or pendicle was around four acres in area, and supported a couple of milk cows and their followers, and a few pigs and hens. Root crops, particularly potatoes and turnips, were also grown for the family's subsistence and as fodder for the stock, with any extra being sold to Perth-based grocers. Stirks were reared and sold at auction in Aberfeldy, with the profits being religiously saved in a bank account along with any residue from James's wages on the big farm. It was this frugality that was eventually to allow the family to move to take over the tenancy of a farm of their own in 1942.

Even a croft of four acres required hard and regular labour input if it was to be run successfully. While James worked it in his spare time, much of the daily and weekly chores were left to the children:

#### **CD Track 2**

WW: On school days you went through the system in the mornin and did your wee jobbie before you went tae school and when you come back at night you had to do the same thing. Feed the beasts and sort the pigs out - turnips and tatties and a this sort o thing.

GW: So that was before you went to school and ...

WW: And when you come back. Saturday forenoon it was - you know you had the sticks to get in and a the odd jobs to get done before he came home at dinnertime or else.

GW: Or else you were for it?

WW: For it!

GW: And that was just expected of you?

WW: It was expected o ye. Just as you was able to do it you had it to do. You know. Startin wi Dave right doon the scale.

GW: So each o the family had their own jobs?

WW: Had their own jobs.

GW: So what did you say - what were these jobs?

WW: Well as I said, you had to get the neeps for the cows, the stirks, wash the tatties for the pigs and you know, Saturday forenoon you had to muck a these places oot, like the pigs. There was a wash hole at the

back o the byre, where all the wash went in, and that had to be emptied out and carried down the field and spread on the young grass ... That was Saturday forenoon's work, and fill the neep shed o neeps - the neeps was stored [near enough?] and you hurled them in wi a barrie. And you'd to dae a these things. You know - sticks, sawin sticks ... to keep the fire goin.

GW: So that was just expected - you didn't get pocket money or anything ...?

WW: Oh no. No, no, no no. No pocket money. You got yer bite o dinner when you come back from school, and you just had to change into yer old togs that ye had and get on wi it.

GW: So that was at weekends and during holidays too presumably.

WW: Oh aye. Well sometimes we went away on holidays for a couple o months to Kinpurnie tae the grandparents when you was a bit older and you got chucked oot tae the berry puin there. (Will West, SA 1988.19)

This pattern of work remained virtually unchanged down through the early experiences of all the children in the family, although there were certainly some basic divisions of labour between the boys and the girls. Jessie, for instance, was twelve before another girl arrived into the family, and so much of the domestic burden of helping out her mother fell on her. The 'domestic' work (a term which in this context is really synonymous with 'women's work') obviously involved a good deal of indoor tasks, but also extended to the feeding of the hens and the milking of the cows. Jessie was taught to milk by her mother at a fairly young age, and she was undoubtedly expected to learn a different set of skills and fulfil different roles within the family to those of her brothers. Indeed, she recalls that her parents were by no means pleased when she decided to take on a job as a spinner at Stanley cotton mill on leaving school, for it was clear that this was not what was expected of her in her situation. Nevertheless, her independence was obviously important to her, for she remained at the mill for ten years before marrying a tenant farmer and moving further up the Tay valley to Tulliemet.

Within the family household unit, some divisions of labour based on gender were unquestioned. Witness Will's response when asked whose job it was to clean the range:

DM: Tell us a little bit about - in the house at that time what was the cooking facilities like?

WW: Well, it wis just a great big black range.

DM: A cast iron range, was it?

WW: A cast iron range, with all the silver on it. Polished so that you could shave in it.

DM: And whose job wis that?

**WW: Who wid it be but mother?**

JR: Mother did all the work?

WW: She did a' the cookin and a' the washin in an outside tub. [The water] was in an outside pump, ye'd tae carry water to the outside shed to do a' the washin. (Heartland FM March 1995 - my emphasis)

'Mother' was also responsible for all the cooking, cleaning, and household budgeting, ensuring that the children were up, washed, dressed and their chores duly completed in good time to walk the two miles to the Murthly school house. She also represented the first line of discipline if any child was tardy in returning from school and was too late to feed the hens and pigs:

We did a' the duties before we went to school and did them when we cam back. And if they werenae did, Lord look ower ye! (ibid.)

Although divisions of labour were clearly demarcated, and certain jobs seem to have been 'female only' (especially cooking and domestic cleaning), other tasks were less gender-specific, and were organised according to a timetable of greatest convenience within the framework of the daily routines of the various family members. The milking of the family's own cows, for instance, was a task which certainly fell into this category, with the children's mother being responsible for the morning milking and their father for the evening session. However, any subsequent processing of the milk was certainly considered women's work, although the younger boys also helped out.<sup>66</sup> The main task was butter making, a laborious job which was carried out once a week to supply the

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<sup>66</sup> It seems that some of the younger boys were taught to help out with 'women's tasks' at Airtully, although this does not seem to have been the case once the family moved north to a tenancy of their own. This was probably to compensate for the absence of daughters who were old enough to be of practical help once Jessie had taken a job at the mill, whereas the girls outnumbered the boys by the time they were installed in Balnabeggan.



family with its own needs and to sell to the grocer for a little extra income. It was not the most popular of chores: 'When you saw that on the go you tried to run away, but you had tae run back quicker!' (ibid.).

### *Paid Work*

While any work which the West children carried out upon their pendicle was just expected of them and was therefore unpaid, they did get the chance to earn a small wage by working on the main farm at certain times of the year, particularly in jobs relating to potato production:

#### **CD Track 3**

DW: ... you'd gather in aboot fifteen or twenty people for tae get their harvest, their potato harvest up ye see. Ye'd three weeks holidays off school tae help the farmers wi the potato crop.

GW: So would you just help on the big farm or would you go round other farms too helpin?

DW: If you finished at the big farm, if someone was later you went and helped there.

GW: So was that paid on a piece work basis?

DW: No no. For an eight hour day you got three shillings.

GW: No matter what you did?

DW: No you had your piece - you had your bit measured out, everybody had the same. Eight yards to a bit and four yards to a half bit.

GW: So that happened at the planting and the ...

DW: No only at the lifting.

GW: Did you have anything to do at the planting?

DW: Ah well, you worked - twelve o you worked wi a bag roond aboot you and you put them down the drill. We daily worked an eight hour day, it would be about the same wages, three shillings a day.

GW: You did this when you were still at school?

DW: Aye at the Easter holidays, if you weren't finished planting you had to go back to school. (Dave West, SA 1988.21)

Another task on the big farm which provided casual employment for the children was turnip thinning. This job was carried out by hand and was very labour-intensive, and as a result provided the chance of employment to all the families occupying pendicles at Airtully. It was common for each family to be allocated a certain area - an acre perhaps - which they worked together as a family unit.



The cash earned from this labour, together with the income from the potato harvest work and any other odd jobs, was a welcome addition to the household budget, being used to buy essentials such as new boots and clothes for the children themselves, or else to add to the savings which were being nurtured to help James fulfil a dream and successfully make the transition from servant to tenant farmer.

### *Balnabeggan*

As each of the boys attained the school leaving age of fourteen, they appear to have had little choice but to leave home in order to make room for the younger children coming through.<sup>67</sup> For them, this was a dramatic rite of passage into adulthood, for it invariably involved their first taste of bothy life and culture as they agreed a six month fee as *orra laddie* on another farm. Dave found himself on a farm about five miles from Airtully (close enough to go back home to visit the family on Sundays), while Will spent a couple of years at home working on the 'big farm' at Airtully, first as the orra lad and then on the fourth pair before finally moving away to drive the second pair on a two-and-a-half pair farm in Strathord. This was the first of ten farms he worked on as a single man. This general pattern was followed by both Jim and Arch, while Alan spent only a year fee'd on a farm before taking up an apprenticeship with the local blacksmith, a career which was eventually to take him to a life in Winnipeg in Canada. Jessie, meanwhile, had married and moved further north.

When James and Isobel flitted to Balnabeggan in Grandtully in 1941, therefore, the six eldest children had already left home, but the potential workforce remained adequate with two boys and three girls continuing to carry out a range of tasks which made the tenancy viable without the need to employ extra hands. Balnabeggan was situated on the Grandtully Estate which was also owned by the

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<sup>67</sup> The enforced nature of their leaving home is graphically summed up by Will West, when he remarks that he was 'heaved oot tae the bothy'. (Heartland FM, March 1995)

Stewart-Fotheringham family, and it was through this link that James West was given the chance to take over the tenancy of his own unit. The land there was less productive than the family had been used to working further south, with an annual rental value in 1943/44 of L71 17s 9d compared to L288 1s 3d at Airntully (Valuation Rolls, AKB CC1 8/1/96). Most of the ground consisted of hill, although the altitude was low enough and the slopes gentle enough to accommodate the mixed production system with which the family had been brought up: this was essentially *haugh* farming on *hill* land.

Norman remembers the move vividly:

#### **CD Track 4**

NW: I remember well the day of the flittin. It consisted of two tractors, and bogies loaded up with the furniture. Mind you, some of the livestock had been moved up maybe two weeks earlier, because I remember on the actual day of the flittin my father and my immediate elder brother Bert were actually at the farm when we arrived with the tractors. My other brothers - Dave, the oldest one - was driving the tractor with the various furniture and additional bits and pieces - stock and what not - which was a Sunday, actually we moved. I can't just remember the time o year but I know it was very very cold. I think it was the back end, winter time.

GW: What age were you at this point?

NW: Eh, seven years old. And I well remember my mother and sisters walkin up to the farm for the first time. It was so cold that I got off ... trying to get the circulation again, it was so cold we were sitting up on top o the tractor comin up the road with the furniture and what not, it was just frozen. So my brother got me off and we walked up to the farm. And I well remember the trek up through the braes o the farm. I wasn't used to braes.

GW: This was a Highland area as opposed to the Lowland ...

NW: That's right. And confronted with trying to install ourselves with all the bits and pieces on the farm. To me it was a great exciting time.

GW: So when you left the old farm, the actual moving, was that all done off your own bat, or did you get any help from outwith?

NW: Well we were assisted by an uncle who had a haulage business. He had lorries and he helped with the actual moving of the heavy items and the livestock we had. It was just bare minimum. A couple of cows and ...

GW: So this was just the livestock your father had on his pendicle?

NW: Yes, yes uh hu, and machinery. I think he did buy additional stock from a farmer he knew well in the vicinity, back in Airntully, just to establish a new stock in the farm. Just the bare minimum requirements at that stage, because it took years and years to build up a stock, but just

maybe a couple of cows and a few calves, and the horses of course. No tractors in those days.

GW: So how many horses would there be?

NW: Two, just two horses. Three at a later stage - an additional one, an orrae horse. But two basically was the mainstay of the working force. And there was just my elder brother Bert and my father, two sisters and myself, and my mother of course.<sup>68</sup> That was the remains of the family to Balnabeggan (SA 1988.18)

The unit comprised around sixty-five acres of arable and one hundred acres of rough grazing and woodland. Potatoes, rye, hay and turnips were the principal crops grown, all of which had to be harvested, for the first few years at least, with family labour alone:

NW: And the harvesting of them was very hard work, I can tell you, because we were not in the position to pay additional labour at the lifting of the potatoes and so the family virtually had to do it all ourselves.

GW: So that was entirely a family thing there was ...

NW: Well in the early years - latterly as we progressed through the years and we became more efficient and moved from horses to tractors, we did employ casual labour for the lifting of the potatoes. (ibid.)

As well as a couple of milking cows and a few pigs which were always kept for domestic use, James and his family also reared beef cattle, and although they did not keep their own stocks of sheep, they did normally winter around one hundred and fifty hogs from the glens further north. These had to be rounded up and counted every week, another task which relied heavily upon the labour of the immediate family.

As Norman's detailed testimony makes clear, the rigidity and disciplined approach to the organisation of each household member's responsibilities which had been a feature of family life at Airntully remained essential in the West's new life at Balnabeggan. Indeed, the need for a strict division of labour was even

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<sup>68</sup> There were actually three sisters, although the youngest, Eileen, was just an infant and was too young to be involved in any of the work. The final child, Alec, was born a short time after the move, and sadly died in infancy.

more acute there, for there were fewer hands having to operate on a much larger scale than on the Airntully pendicle. The disciplined approach is highlighted at several points in Norman's testimony:

Now, my father being a - slavedriver -

But the task had to be done and done properly. My father ensured it was done properly and woe betide you if it wasn't.

And everything had to be done thoroughly. As I say, woe betide you if it wasn't done by the time my father came home.

The gender divisions, which had been relaxed to a certain extent at Airntully due to the lack of daughters, were re-emphasised in the new context, for even as young as seven years of age, Norman's responsibilities differed from those of his sisters: the girls fed the hens and pigs, while Norman carried out the more menial tasks relating to the cattle. As the children grew older, it was axiomatic that the girls would begin to 'specialise' in the domestic work of the household while the boys were trained to work the fields and to learn the ways of the exclusive male domain of horse handling:

### **CD Track 5**

GW: So as you got a wee bit older on the farm, did your tasks change from in the early days? Were you given any more special responsibilities?

NW: Well as I grew older and more physically able, I was the orrae man on the farm, I had a wee horse o my own, and I was able to do every day one-horse tasks, you know, harrowing, rolling, cart work. Virtually an orrae man's job, which I dearly loved. I had a great love for horses. My brother did all the ploughing and that with this pair o horses. I couldn't do any of the ploughing, I was too small. Well I have ploughed, I've had a shot from my brother, but I wasn't physically able to go an plough a field myself as it were. But I did a lot of orrae work, with the horse as I say. Carting turnips, the harvest time we'd a horse and cart, harrowing, drill work and that. All work capable of being done with a single horse.

GW: So what age would you be when you were entrusted with that?

NW: Oh, twelve, onwards.

GW: So you'd still be at school?

NW: Oh yes, still at school. This was done in the evenings in the summer months, and all weekends, all my holidays. It was full time on



the farm as far as work was concerned in my early days. This is ranging from as I say, twelve until I left school at fifteen. (SA 1988.18)

When Norman did leave school it was clear that Balnabeggan could not support another full time worker, for his older brother, Bert, was already working the farm with their father. Although James was keen for his youngest son to remain in farming, Norman was persuaded by his mother to seek a trade outwith agriculture, perhaps realising that the tractor age which they had by now entered was to greatly reduce employment opportunities on the land. Norman found a position as an apprentice electrician in Aberfeldy and so left the farming way of life behind him. Bert took over the tenancy of Balnabeggan on his parents' retiral, bringing up his own family there before moving to Crieff in the early 1980s. Dot married a tenant farmer and set up home on a hill farm in neighbouring Atholl, while Isobel stayed at home to keep house for her parents, taking a post as a housekeeper in Pitlochry following her mother's death in 1975, her father having died in 1967. Aileen married and set up with her husband in the hotel trade in various parts of North Perthshire.

### *Belonging to a Name*

Listening to the testimonies of these family members, it becomes clear that each individual has a different story to tell, and lived through a different set of experiences to those of his or her siblings. Factors such as gender, age order, and the nature of the surrounding agricultural infrastructure undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping individual experience, and of course the life stories of each in the period since their childhood days is bound to have coloured their reflections within the interview situations. It might be reasonable to suspect, for instance, that those who did not follow a farming life mode in their adult years, such as my father, Norman, recall the daily chores of their childhood with a rosier tinge than those for whom such tasks remained a part of their daily routines long after leaving the family home. For others, particularly Will, his reminiscence is undoubtedly at its most enthusiastic when talking of his days



working with horses, and so when left to articulate his own biography (whether on tape or not), his childhood days are undoubtedly overshadowed by his bothy experiences, as is plain to see in Chapter Three below.

Nonetheless, there are clearly several common threads running through the testimony of all the family members quoted above. Perhaps the strongest is *respect*: respect for their parents and grandparents and for the other farming folk around them, but also respect for the *way of life*. There is little sentimentality; none of them tried to portray themselves as some kind of 'kailyard' hero-family incarnate, although it is interesting that they seldom talked as candidly on tape as they did 'off microphone' about the squabbles, jealousies and outright fisticuffs which certainly took place on occasion between them in their younger days. However, their respect was real and genuine, for all seem to have believed in the way of life, and indeed recognised and celebrated their own childhood roles in their family's survival and development.

There is pride too, in the family name. A nuclear family of this size, combined with a significant number of uncles, aunts and cousins living and working in the same area of the county resulted in a formidable 'West' presence in local society. Whether it was a view shared by others or not, they saw themselves as good workers with a solid reputation for skill, commitment and industry and the network of employment contacts established by the older members was used to the advantage of their younger brothers when searching for a position. Well into adulthood, gatherings at the parental home each week for Sunday lunch continued religiously and rites of passage, particularly weddings, were always celebrated in the presence of 'the family'. Indeed, when the invitation 'rules' were inadvertently broken within my own generation, one particular sibling relationship broke down. The riff lasted twenty years. (By writing this I may have caused another!)

The sense of belonging within the family, then, is strong, and is manifested in both positive and negative forms. For me, the very act of carrying out this work has strengthened my own sense of family identity as well as my sense of 'place'. This is a two-way process, for several of my relatives have articulated their surprise and satisfaction that I should show interest in their past lives. My father's generation are very conscious, I now realise, of having been the last representatives of the farming life in their blood line, the link between tradition and modernity, and they seem pleased to have had this captured in my writing.

### **Family - Closing Remarks**

This chapter has attempted to provide a flavour of the importance of family labour to Perthshire agriculture during the post-improvement period, and more particularly, to highlight the family *experience* of farming at the micro level. Like most of the sub-themes addressed within this research, it is recognised that this topic could happily form the basis of an entire thesis in itself, and as such the present treatment may well have thrown up more questions than it has been able to answer. Indeed, the answer to some of them - how did childhood experiences differ according to family status and economic background? (e.g. whether children of farmers, crofters, or labourers); how were life *chances* affected by these same factors and others such as gender, and what were the implications of family size in shaping modes of living? - have been successfully provided by Jamieson and Toynbee in their excellent sociological study of 1992 relating to the early decades of the twentieth century. Some of the conclusions presented in that work are certainly reflected in the West family experience:

Among farm servants and crofters, girls and boys shared the same elementary schooling but at school age they were already doing 'women's work' or 'men's work' out of school hours. Both boys and girls learned that housework was 'women's work' unless no woman was available, and they learned that activities like ploughing and fishing were only done by men'. (Jamieson and Toynbee 1992: 212)

In most households, while children were of school age the norm was that they automatically obeyed parents, and 'speaking back' or spontaneously offering opinions was not only discouraged but actively forbidden. (ibid.: 216)

... a large family was not necessarily undesired. A well-spaced family does not mean a house-hold bursting with children. The oldest children had often left home before the youngest were born. (ibid.: 203)

Occupational destinations had a remarkable sameness for the children of farm workers, although sons and daughters went their separate ways. With only one exception among the men we interviewed, the sons of farm workers became farm workers. Several told us they simply 'followed in father's footsteps'. (ibid.: 205)

The West family certainly adhered closely to this common template. Their experiences, when considered within the wider Scottish framework set out by Jamieson and Toynbee, suggests that family labour remained an essential link in the agricultural infrastructure of the twentieth century, a fact which is not necessarily reflected in official statistics. On a practical basis, the daily routines of the West children differed very little from those of their nineteenth century forebears who, as we have seen, were carrying out the same tasks and were also attempting to achieve an acceptable balance between formal education and economically necessary labour provision.

In many respects, the family farming experience within Perthshire showed little variation throughout our period of study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A FAMILY APART: THE BOTHY SYSTEM

With the exception of the Carse of Gowrie, Perthshire has largely been forgotten as having been one of the principal 'bothy areas' of post-improvement Scottish agriculture, despite the fact that the bothy acted as home to thousands of Perthshire men for the century and a half preceding the Second World War.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the bothy was the focal point of domestic and social life and intercourse throughout much of the *carse* and to a lesser extent, the *haugh* areas of Perthshire during our period of study, and for many its memory continues to serve as a symbol of farm servant culture during the horse-powered period of Perthshire farming history. As the most common form of housing provision for unmarried male servants during our period, bothy life represented an important stage in the life cycle of a large proportion of the agricultural workforce. Entry to the bothy environment was a central rite of passage into adulthood for many young men in these areas and it is significant that many informants will dwell on their bothy experiences, as opposed to married 'cottage life', when left to articulate their own life story within oral interview sessions.

This chapter seeks to examine the importance of the bothy system to post-improvement Perthshire agriculture in general, but more especially to the lives of those individuals for whom it represented a recognisable and remembered life stage. Initially, the origins and diffusion of the bothy system within the Perthshire context will be examined, followed by an ethnographic account of bothy life

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<sup>69</sup> In their seminal work on Scottish rural architecture, for example, Fenton and Walker (1981) make no mention of Perthshire when referring to the bothy system: 'Angus and the Mearns took the lead in the development of bothies, which became common there and in parts of Fife, the Lothians, Berwickshire, Easter Ross and Caithness' (146). Also, the common suggestion that the bothy system disappeared in Scotland following World War I is erroneous. Oral testimony clearly shows that it is World War II that should be seen as the marker for the disappearance of this system.

reconstructed from written and oral source data. Finally, the assertion made by Sprott (1980: 101) that the bothy system represents 'something of an independent sub-culture' within the context of general patterns of farm servant employment is explored. I argue that Sprott is correct, and that the bothy was appropriated by the farm servant population as a powerful icon and symbol of worker identity and anti-establishment thinking.

### **Origins and Diffusion of the Bothy System**

There can be little doubt that the housing of farm servants in outhouses on a self-catering basis was a principle which emerged in Scotland as a consequence of the social re-ordering which accompanied general agricultural change during the late eighteenth century, and as such, the creation of the bothy system should be seen as one manifestation of the Agricultural Improvements. There is no surviving evidence of the existence of bothies in this context in Scotland before the final decade of the eighteenth century, although it is reasonable to speculate that the idea of housing servants away from the main farmhouse may well have been occurring to some farmers during the 1770s and 1780s, and perhaps some took action accordingly.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, it is the OSA of the 1790s which reveals the first solid evidence for the emergence of the bothy system, the epicentre of which within a national Scottish context was in Perthshire in the Carse of Gowrie. The report for Errol, for example, clearly shows that by this stage, the servants were no longer considered to be part of the farming household:

Most of the male servants have their lodgings apart from the dwelling of the farmer; and for victuals, which they prepare themselves, receive 2 pecks of oat-meal a week, and a certain measure of milk for each diet.  
(OSA Vol XI: 173)

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<sup>70</sup> In his examination of the bothy system in Angus and the Mearns, for instance, Adams speculates that bothies probably began to be established there from the 1770s (Adams 1991: 9).



The fact that the servants prepared their food themselves is the crucial point here, for under the old system, there was not always enough room for all the servants to sleep under the farmhouse roof; some slept in quarters above stables, byres and barns, but normally ate at the farmhouse kitchen table. This 'kitchen', 'kitchie', or 'chaulmer' system remained dominant well into the twentieth century in some parts of Scotland, especially in the north-east,<sup>71</sup> but in Lowland Perthshire and neighbouring Angus the bothy system prevailed.

While the author of the Errol OSA report does not actually refer to the bothy by name, his colleague in Longforgan parish does. Here we have what appears to be the earliest surviving use of the word within this specific context, and once again, it comes from the Carse of Gowrie<sup>72</sup>. Here the anonymous author is describing the recent trend in the area for farmers to invest in new stone-built, architect-designed steadings and farmhouses:

The dwelling-house is a little detached from, and advanced before the offices, forming one side of a square: the other three sides of which consist of offices. The barns forming the side opposite to the house, with a threshing-mill behind: and the other two sides are stables, byres, cart-shades, granaries, bothie, etc.; and the dung-court is in the centre of the square. The bothie is the apartment of the farm-servants where they sleep, dress their victuals and eat. (OSA Vol XI: 327)

Elsewhere in the Longforgan account we are told that the farm servants 'formerly lived with the family', but unfortunately no clue is given as to how recently this change had been made nor indeed where the idea may have originated. However, this information, when combined with that contained within the above extract, undoubtedly serves to emphasise the perceived status

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<sup>71</sup> This creates an interesting paradox, as this was the area which created a substantial part of the corpus of bothy ballads, despite the fact that there were actually very few bothies to be found there. For a full account of the relative distribution of the bothy, chaulmer and boarding out systems in North East Scotland, see Carter 1979:120-127.

<sup>72</sup> Adams suggests that 'the earliest use of the word (bothy) to mean a permanent house for self-catering farm workers seems to be by Headrick and Robertson in their accounts of the agriculture of Angus and the Mearns, both published in 1813' (Adams 1991: 10). The Longforgan source, then, pre-dates this by some 18 years.

of the bothy. It is linked - both physically and perhaps by extension psychologically - to the working buildings of the farm yard and not to the only other human residence form, the farmhouse. Arguably, it is a tangible manifestation and symbol of the increasing polarisation of rural society caused by the growing gulf which was beginning to emerge between master and servant (or occasionally mistress and servant) as a result of the new-found capitalist infrastructure of carse farming.<sup>73</sup> This trend is examined elsewhere in this thesis, but the material culture of the new farm building set-up, by now specifically designed and purpose built, represents a distinct move away from the old paternalist principles which seem to have been a feature of the pre-improved farming culture of the area. Now, the farmers were undoubtedly the masters and their employees the servants, a doctrine which was being firmly underlined even in the actual physical layout of the farms.

However, none of the other OSA accounts from Perthshire imply that this move within the Carse of Gowrie was becoming a general trend at this time, for those reports which indulge in such detail reveal that the status quo was being maintained in the other parishes of the county. In Cargill, some miles to the north of the Carse, the labour was mostly carried out by servants living in the farmers' houses (OSA Vol XI: 63), while the minister of Abernyte informs us that this was the normal arrangement in his area too (*ibid.*: 24). It is possible that his comment regarding the amount of provisions allocated to those servants who 'do not eat in the house' suggests the existence of bothies, but this could just as easily be a reference to married servants who were being accommodated in cottages. In St Madoes parish too, the unmarried servants were 'living in' (*ibid.*: 550).

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<sup>73</sup> Carter refers to this process as a breakdown in the 'kindly relations' between master and men which it is claimed typified the pre-improvement system of the North-East (1979: 157)

That the bothy system was by no means widespread in Perthshire by the end of the eighteenth century is corroborated by the works of two 'expert' agricultural commentators of the 1790s, James Robertson and William Marshall. Marshall's *General View of the Agriculture of the Central Highlands of Scotland* of 1794 makes no mention of the bothy system. Robertson's contribution was in the form of his *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Perth*, published in 1799. In a lengthy section assessing the state of farm housing in the county at that time, Robertson too makes no direct mention of the existence of bothies, concentrating his comments instead on the improved state of some farmhouses and steadings while contrasting this to the 'ill constructed and inconvenient' hovels of the less-advanced members of the farming community (Robertson 1799: 59). In the following extract, however, he does appear to hint that a version of the bothy concept was beginning to appear in some unspecified areas of the county:

The cottages of the poor are very mean in all places: but in this country the dwellings of the labourers and married servants are keeping pace with the houses of the farmers, being in a progressive state of improvement. When the farmer obtains a house of two floors for the accommodation of his own family, he commonly reserves the low house, in which he formerly lived, for his servants. (ibid.: 59)

It is very likely that in the initial stages of the development of the bothy system, not all bothies were specially constructed as an integral part of the newly built improved steadings, as was the case in Longforan, but rather that older, existing buildings may have been put to new use as a means of housing the servants outwith the farmhouse. This appears to be the implication of Robertson's description above.

A survey of the Perthshire New Statistical Account reports of the 1830s and 1840s, reveals that the Carse of Gowrie remained the principal bothy area of the county, and that this system had increased in use there in the intervening period

since the publication of the OSA a generation or so earlier. In Rhynd parish most of the tenants were now employing unmarried servants

... who live together in a small house termed a “bothy”, one of which is attached to each farm’. (NSA Vol X: 366)

The Rev. Mr Walker, in his Longforgan report, informs us that the bothy system remained prevalent there too (*ibid.*: 412) while in Kinfauns unmarried men ‘usually’ lived in bothies (*ibid.*: 1217).

By this stage of the nineteenth century, however, the bothy concept had begun to diffuse outward from the Carse of Gowrie into at least three other Lowland Perthshire parishes. In Arngask the bothy system had been ‘of late years, partially introduced’ (*ibid.*: 890); in Forteviot ‘among the farm servants, the bothy system universally prevails’ (*ibid.*: 1175) while the author of the Auchtergaven report was lamenting at length the introduction of the bothy system which he viewed as being largely responsible for the poor moral health of many of his flock (*ibid.*: 451).

Of course in using the Statistical Accounts as evidence it must be emphasised that their scope is rather limited, for the authors varied enormously in their depth of coverage and attention to detail. In general, the NSA is rather disappointing in terms of its contribution to our knowledge of farm servant housing, for few of the authors appear to have considered this theme worthy of anything but the most fleeting of references. It is probable that bothies would have been in use in more than just six Perthshire parishes by this stage of the nineteenth century, a suggestion given strength by evidence contained in the Poor Law Enquiry of 1843. Some of the Perthshire material from this is analysed in detail below, but it also serves to illustrate the (albeit limited) extent to which the bothy system had diffused outward from the Carse of Gowrie by this time. Its existence is specifically mentioned in relation to the parishes of Auchtergaven, Arngask, Dunbarney, Stanley, Rhynd, Tibbermore and Muckart.



More solid evidence does not emerge until the 1860s in the form of the Royal Commission *Report into the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, conducted in 1867 and published as a Parliamentary Paper in 1870. While housing provision and living conditions were not themes which were central to the Commissioners' agenda, the evidence gathered at parish level does provide invaluable qualitative data on a number of issues, and is certainly most helpful in any attempt to trace the distribution pattern of the bothy system.

In all, 22 Perthshire parishes were visited by the survey team, and of those only one - Fortingall (the only Highland parish visited) - failed to mention the existence of bothies within the parish. The report reveals that by 1867, the bothy system existed in the following parishes:

Abernyte; Auchterarder; Auchtergaven; Caputh; Collace; Dron; Dunbarney; Errol; Inchtute; Kilspindie; Kinfauns; Kinnaird; Longforan; Methven; Moneydie; Monzievaird & Strowan; Muthill; Redgorton; St Madoes; St Martins; Scone.

Of those, most also give some indication of the *extent* to which the bothy system was used. In Abernyte it prevailed 'to some extent for unmarried men and youths'; in Auchtergaven it was said to prevail 'on most of the large farms'; in Caputh it was 'almost universal'; in Dunbarney, bothies were in general use for unmarried ploughmen; in Dron it was home to 'most' of the male servants; in Inchtute the system existed but 'not to a great extent'; in Kilspindie the bothy was considered to be 'a most important building' being the residence of 'all the unmarried men regularly employed on the farm'; in Kinfauns the Rev. Mr Davidson claimed that its use was actually on the decrease with only three farms in the district continuing to use it; in Kinnaird the system prevailed 'extensively' as indeed it continued to do in Longforan; in Methven, Scone and the combined



parish of Monzievaird and Strowan it existed 'to a certain extent'; in Rhynd its use was common for both men and women, while in St Madoes it was certainly known but was said to hardly exist at all (*Fourth Report*, Appendix A, County of Perth: 69-93).

The commissioners also sought evidence from a number of experts who were closely involved in Perthshire agriculture in one way or another, and who were able to talk more generally about a range of issues in which the Commission was interested. One such interviewee was Fletcher N Menzies, Secretary to the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and himself an occupier in Breadalbane. Menzies asserts that the bothy system did not exist in his district, but that

for 17 years I used it with no evil results, but I do not think the mode of living, viz. on meal and milk entirely, is good for the men. I have now a housekeeper who lives in the farmhouse and cooks for them. ... The farm servants live in the farmhouse, sometimes with the farmer's family, sometimes with his female servants, as the case may be. The latter plan is worse than the bothy system. (ibid.)

Another Highland Perthshire landowner and occupier, Sir Robert Menzies, Bart., informs us that he had bothies on two of his farms in Breadalbane, believing them to be 'the best way of lodging and feeding unmarried men' (ibid.), while Robert Elliot, an occupier from an undisclosed area of the Highland part of the county also testified to the fact that the bothy system existed to some extent in his area. He had arrived in the locality from Dumfriesshire where servants had normally been lodged in farm kitchens, and had been of the opinion that the bothy system was a bad arrangement. After fourteen years' experience in Perthshire, however, he had altered his view and on his own farm now provided a bothy for the four or five young male servants he employed (ibid.).

It is clear, then, that by the 1860s, the bothy system was widespread in Lowland Perthshire and was by no means unknown in the Highland area too. The situation is highlighted by Commissioner Culley in his analysis of the evidence he had

gathered in Perthshire, in which he outlines the principal bothy areas of the county and remarks that in the Highland area variations upon the kitchen system prevailed. The Carse of Gowrie and the 'lower part of Strathearn' were the main bothy areas of the county, he explained:

On arable farms in Perthshire, especially in the Carse of Gowrie and neighbourhood, a large proportion of the ploughmen are unmarried and live in bothies, cooking their own food and (with a few exceptions, where the wife of a neighbouring foreman or cattleman gives the bothy an occasional "redd-up"), performing all necessary domestic duties for themselves. (ibid.)

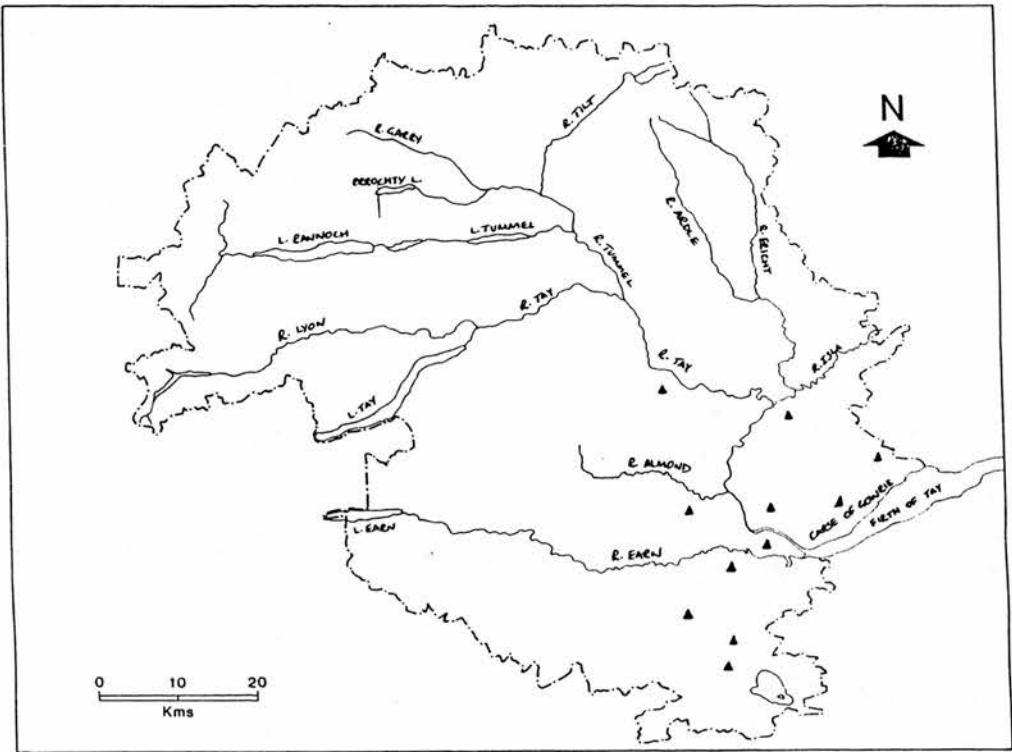
Culley attempts to provide an explanation for this. These areas were primarily concentrating on arable production and were less suited to the rearing of root crops:

Having then the necessity of providing a ploughman for about every 40 acres of arable land, and requiring very little help except in harvesting corn and potatoes ... and having too, in former times, a sufficient supply of female labour from the families of hand-loom weavers for his occasional jobs, the carse farmer naturally fell into a system of employing unmarried ploughmen as the cheaper article. On the breakdown of the 'kitchen system', consequent on the increase of the size of farms, and rise in the social scale of the farmer class, the bothy became the home of the ploughmen. (ibid.)

Culley makes several important observations in this short extract. He recognises, for instance, the link between the bothy system and the increasing social gulf between farmer and servant as discussed above. Also his point regarding the increasing size of farm units is valid: in those areas where farms tended to be large and many servants were regularly employed, it may have been no longer possible to house them or feed them within the farmhouse, and the construction of bothies proved a much cheaper option than providing cottage accommodation for such large numbers. Closely linked to this point, is the question of the preference of farmers for either married or unmarried employees, for this factor

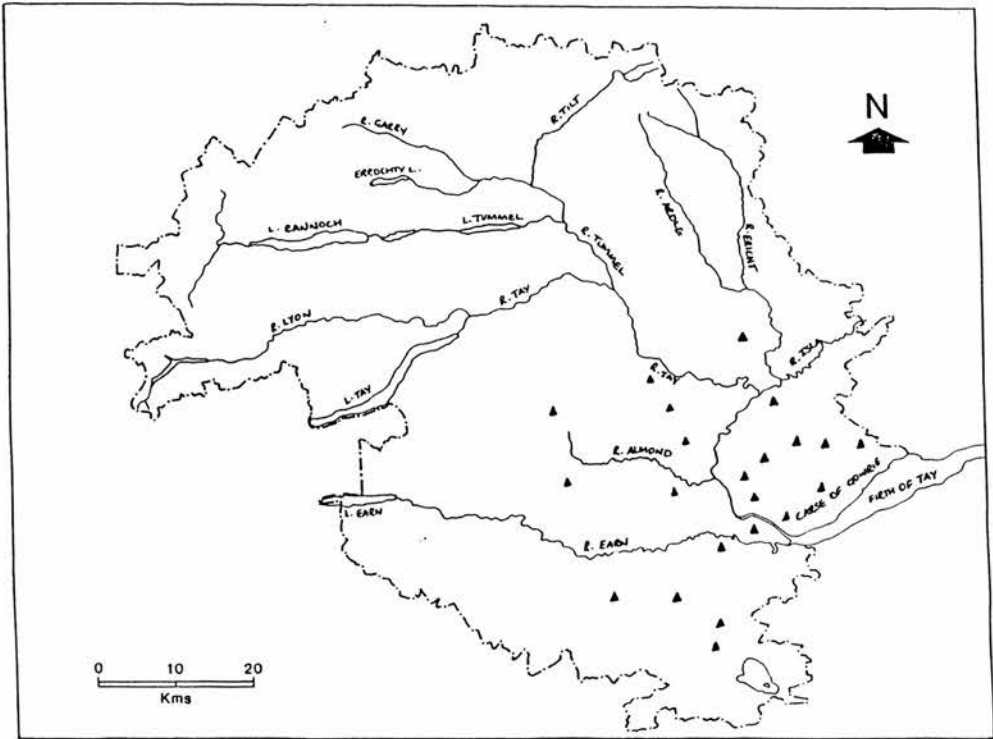
**Figure 3.1**

*Confirmed Distribution of Bothies by Parish, Perthshire 1843*



**Figure 3.2**

*Confirmed Distribution of Bothies By Parish, Perthshire 1867*



seems to have played a significant role in determining the distribution pattern of the bothy system within nineteenth century Perthshire.

The question of employers' preferences for married or unmarried farm servants was one which drew a fair amount of attention from various nineteenth century Scottish commentators. One of the earliest was Robert Hope, farmer at one of the largest arable concerns in the country, Fenton Barns in East Lothian. In 1814, Hope conducted an analysis of such preferences throughout much of the nation. He found that by this stage, the employment of married servants living in cottages and hired on a yearly contract was already quite widespread throughout much of the country, but there were discernible variations in the degree of emphasis placed upon these servants over non-married workers boarding within the farmhouse and employed on six-monthly contracts. Married men were generally preferred in the south-east (East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles), in Midlothian, West Lothian, Clackmannan, Kinross and Fife. In most of the other Lowland counties farmers continued to favour unmarried servants, although in Perthshire, Angus and Kincardine the situation was rather mixed. There, many employers took on married men, certainly, but unmarried servants were by no means unusual. Hope noted in these counties the beginnings of a new form of housing these unmarried servants - the bothy - but saw little of value in this innovation. In the Highland districts, and also in the south-west, farmers tended to rely on the services of family members, although in some areas, such as Inverness and Cromarty, bigger farmers did indeed employ both married servants who were housed with their families in cottages, and unmarried servants living in the farmhouse (Hope 1814: 225-41).

With regard to the middle years of the nineteenth century, a quantitative analysis of the situation regarding preferences for employing married or unmarried

servants can also be undertaken through an examination of the Royal Commission report which set out to investigate poor relief in Scotland in 1843.<sup>74</sup> The investigation took the form of a highly structured questionnaire-based examination of a wide range of themes. Question 24 asked (rather clumsily)

‘Is any preference shown to unmarried labourers over married labourers, as farm servants in your parish, or the reverse?’

Levitt and Smout (1979) have considered the answers provided to this and many other questions on a Scotland-wide basis. Of the 814 responses to this question (89% of parishes), 32% declared that married servants were preferred, 39% claimed that unmarried servants were preferred, and 29% could find no particular preference. On the whole, these findings tend to corroborate those of Robert Hope. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the existence there of the bondager tradition whereby servants were employed on condition that they could provide a female worker too, the grain producing regions of East Lothian and the Eastern Borders tended to show the strongest preference for married servants. Some preference for married men was also demonstrated in the south-west dairying districts, in Fife, and also in Angus (*ibid.*: 91). Levitt and Smout find the Angus results rather surprising, given the fact that the bothy system was so widespread there by this time, but suggest that the question may well have been interpreted literally by many respondents; perhaps married men would have been *preferred*, if there had been enough cottage accommodation to house them, they surmise, but that in fact unmarried servants were more common (*ibid.*: 71).

Levitt and Smout’s macro study details the results on a county basis. In order to uncover the situation at the more localised parish level for Perthshire, it is necessary to return to the Report itself. Detailed below are the answers to question 24 for the 63 Perthshire parishes which responded.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> This was published in 6 volumes as a Parliamentary Paper in *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law (Scotland)* in 1844, Vols 20 - 25.

<sup>75</sup> It is felt necessary to include the text of the answers provided, rather than rely exclusively on a quantitative approach. It is quite apparent that limiting the analysis to a statistical form



Parishes showing preference for unmarried servants:-

Auchtergaven - 'I rather think a preference is given to unmarried servants by the farmers. The men servants of most farms live in bothies - a bad system'.

Caputh - 'The foreman or grieve usually a married man: the other servants generally unmarried'.

Moulin - 'Preference is given to unmarried labourers'.

Dull - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Glenlyon - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Kenmore - 'The farm servants are almost invariably unmarried'.

Killin - 'Almost all reside with their masters, and are generally unmarried; but many instances of married servants who have a cot from their employer'.

Strathfillan - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Logierait - 'Unmarried generally preferred but married often employed if accommodation available'.

Weem - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Aberdalgie - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Dunbarney - 'Unmarried more frequent owing to the bothy system'.

Redgorton - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Stanley - 'Unmarried generally preferred and this on account of the ruinous bothy system'.

Rhynd - 'Servants chiefly unmarried and live together in bothies. There are few houses for married servants'.

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would serve to distort the picture, for many respondents felt it necessary to qualify their answers in some way.

Tibbermore - 'There are many more unmarried than married servants employed, not because they are preferred, but because the farmers have no houses for married servants; they have only bothies, the curse of the district'.

Gask - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Glendevon - 'Unmarried generally engaged'.

Muthill - 'Unmarried labourers are preferred, chiefly from the want of cottages for those married: a state of things much to be regretted'.

Balquhidder - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Callander - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Dunblane - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Kilmadock - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Kincardine - 'Unmarried preferred'.

Parishes showing preference for married servants:-

Cargill - 'There is usually a preference given to married farm servants, so far as the farmer can find cottages for them: the accommodation, however, in that respect is generally limited on the farms'.

Dowally - 'Married preferred'.

Lethendy & Kinloch - 'Married labourers are preferred when houses can be got for them or on the farms'.

Collace - 'Where cottages can be had married are preferred'.

Forgandenny - 'Married labourers are now beginning to be preferred by the farmers'.

Kinfauns - 'There is evidently a preference shown to the married over the unmarried. For there are always more of the married; and, taking all their allowances into account, they are paid at a somewhat higher rate'.

St Madoes - 'There is a growing disposition to prefer married servants, if houses could be found for them'.

St Martins - 'I think there is a tendency now to seek after married men'.

Monedie - 'When landlords will build cottages, I think the farmers prefer married servants; they are steadier'.

Madderty - 'Married servants are preferred by those who have accommodation for them'.

Parishes showing no preference:-

Blair Atholl - 'No preference'.

Clunie - 'Both married and unmarried labourers are employed in the parish. If there is a preference shown, I am not aware of it'.

Little Dunkeld - 'No preference'.

Kinclaven - 'Some of the farmers prefer married ploughmen, while others prefer unmarried, just as they happen to have cottages for married men, or not'.

Kirkmichael - 'No preference'.

Ratray - 'No preference'.

Fortingall - 'No preference'.

Abernethy - 'No preference'.

Arngask - 'Some farmers having introduced the bothy system prefer unmarried labourers; but others prefer married men, especially when there are cottages upon the farms for their accommodation'.

Dron - 'No preference'.

Errol - 'Many farmers show a preference to the unmarried, and always have a large proportion of that class; others are manifesting a preference to the married'.

Kilspindie - 'No preference'.

Kinnoul - 'Preference is shown to married foremen; but none to other farm servants'.

Methven - 'No preference'.

Scone - 'Nearly half are married'.

Auchterarder - 'No preference'.

Blackford - 'No preference'.

Comrie - 'No preference'.

Crieff - 'No preference'.

Dunning - 'No preference'.

Fossoway and Tulliebole - 'Some prefer one, some the other according as they may have, or have not, houses to accommodate'.

Fowlis Wester - 'No preference'.

Monievaird and Strowan - 'No preference'.

Monzie - 'No preference'.

Muckart - 'No preference, with the exception of three farms where there are bothies, and no dwelling houses for servants'.

Trinity Gask - 'No preference'.

Aberfoyle - 'Preference shown to unmarried labourers on the grain farms, and to married men on the sheep farms'.

Tulliallan - 'Circumstances regulate this'.

Other:-

One parish, Dunkeld, stated rather surprisingly that there were no farm servants in the area.

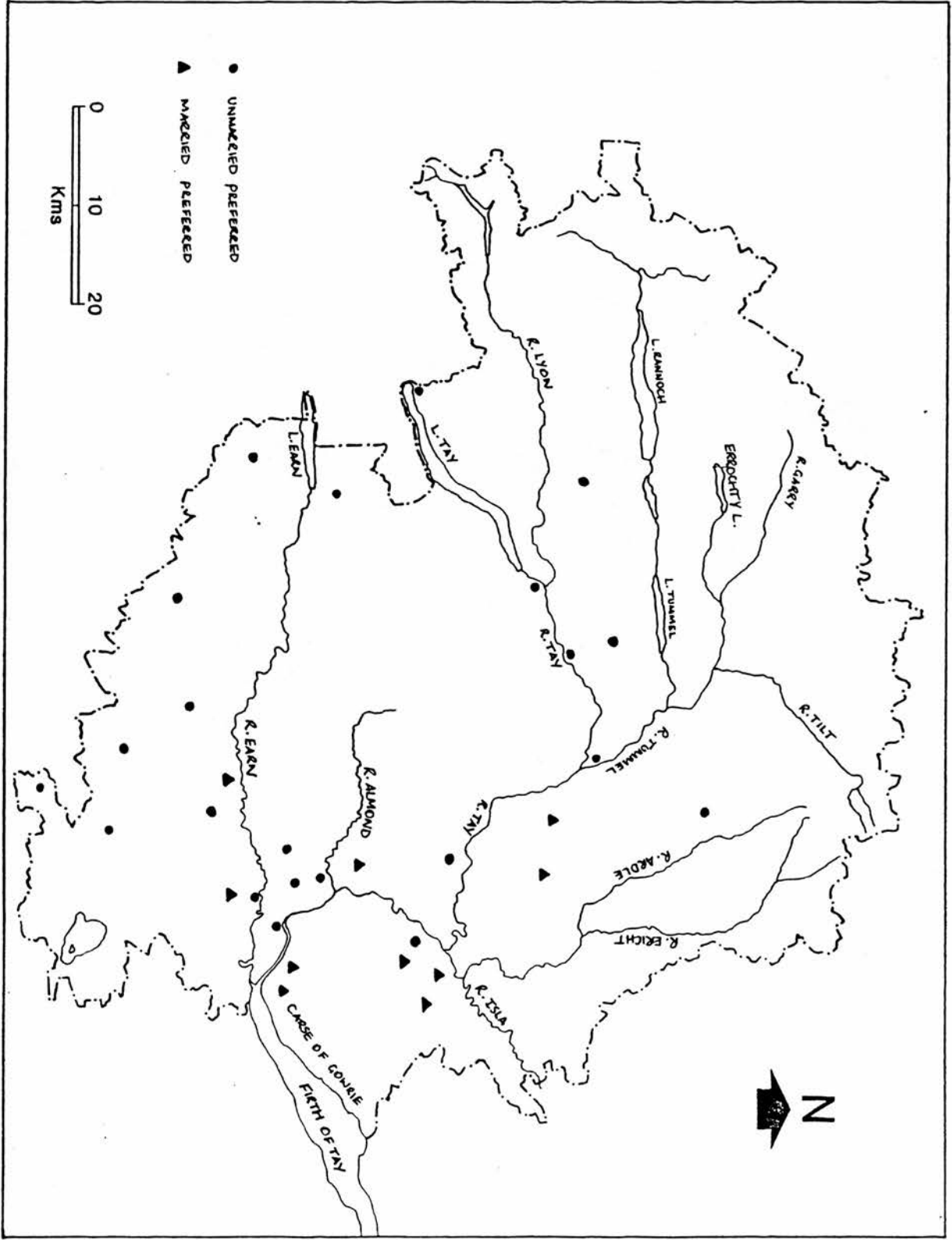
In statistical terms, then, 28 of the responses (44.5%) claimed that there was no preference or that it depended on individual circumstances; 10 responses (15.9%) suggested that married workers were preferred, and 24 responses (38%) preferred unmarried servants. The claim from Dunkeld that there were no farm servants in the parish accounts for the remaining 1.6% of responses.

Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of these preferences within Perthshire.

It is clear from the qualifying comments which many of these respondents felt compelled to include, that the true situation regarding local preferences on this question was rather more complex and variable than raw statistics would imply. The comments of Levitt and Smout regarding the Angus results are certainly lent support by the analysis of the Perthshire material, for many witnesses overtly made the point that preferences were very closely linked to the availability of certain forms of accommodation, and that this would of course vary from farm to farm. The suggestion that many farmers would have preferred married servants if they had been able to accommodate them, then, is fully backed up by the extracts above. The reverse of this, however, may also be true in some cases: some farmers preferred to engage single men because they did *not* therefore have to worry about providing them individually with accommodation.



Figure 3.3  
*Farmers Showing Preferences for Married or Unmarried Servants, Perthshire 1843*



By the final decade of the nineteenth century, the diffusion of the bothy system seems to have reached its natural conclusion, but the use of bothies remained common in most of the *carse* and *haugh* areas of Perthshire, as the evidence gathered in 1893-4 by the Royal Commission on Labour clearly illustrates. In all of the Lowland Perthshire parishes visited - Dunblane, Auchterarder, Crieff, Muthill, Perth, Collace, Meikle, Inchtute, Scone and Errol - bothies remained 'the rule' with the men continuing to prepare their own food<sup>76</sup> while a number of the larger farmers working the Breadalbane *haugh* lands also continued to view the bothy as the most effective and economic means of accommodating their servants. Indeed, the combined evidence of Parliamentary Reports on housing in Scotland conducted in 1917 and in 1936-7, together with oral testimony recorded both during the current research and already housed in the School of Scottish Studies and the Scottish Life Archive of the National Museums of Scotland, reveals that bothies remained an important part of farm servant life in Lowland, and to a lesser extent, Highland Perthshire throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The following section provides a brief ethnographical account of this way of life.

## Bothy Life

### *Conditions*

Probably no aspect of rural housing has received so much attention as the bothy, and no system has been so roundly condemned: yet it survives, little changed from the days when the first onslaught was made on it about seventy years ago. The worst of the old hovels have disappeared, but there still remain instances of bothies that are not fit to house animals. Generally speaking, however, the actual structure of the bothies will compare favourably with the cottages. Where the bothy fails is in the internal arrangements and the social conditions produced by

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<sup>76</sup> On some small farms in the Dunblane area, where there were only one or two men in each bothy, they slept there but took their meals in the farm kitchen. This was said to be very rare, however (*Report of the Royal Commission on Labour 1893-4, The Agricultural Labourer, Scotland* XXXVI: 148. Hereafter, *The Agricultural Labourer*)

herding young men together with no proper provision for food or comfort. It combines a maximum of discomfort with a minimum of civilised conditions. (*Royal Commission on Housing* 1917: 171)

The commissioners charged with the 1917 investigation into the housing conditions of the Scottish people were aware of the reputation of the bothy system and realised that little had changed throughout its lifetime. The accommodation provided within the bothies remained of the most basic form despite constant agitation for improvement by well-intentioned outsiders. Although technically indicative of the 'improved' form of farm steading, the bothy rarely lived up to the implications of that term and indeed remained synonymous with spartan living space until its eventual disappearance in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>77</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, many of Perthshire's bothies consisted of a single room, in which the men ate, slept, stored their belongings and passed away their evenings. In Kilspindie parish, 'any wretched hovel was good enough' for this purpose, although by 1867 the standard of bothy accommodation was beginning to improve, as 'the onward march of intelligence' encouraged the construction of more comfortable dwellings for the unmarried servants. These had a general sitting room, a bedroom for each man (complete with window) and each room was under lock and key. The walls were of lath and plaster, the floors were mainly of wood, although the sitting room floor was tiled with brick, the roofs were slated and fitted with guttering, downpipes and drains, and outside a coalpit and ashpit were provided for each bothy (*Fourth Report*: 79-80). General conditions were said to be improving within the Carse of Gowrie, too, at this time, with more of the bothies being renovated or re-built with single bedrooms and a common room for meals (*ibid.*).

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<sup>77</sup> Even today in Perthshire the term often used colloquially to refer to the struggle of making the most of poor living space is 'to bothy it'.

The conditions described above, however, were undoubtedly representative of the most advanced pole of the spectrum of standards, for even by the final years of the nineteenth century many of Perthshire's bothies remained extremely basic. A tenant farmer from the Muthill area of Strathearn complained in 1893 that

The bothy accommodation ... is very bad; generally there is only one apartment, whatever the number of men. All sleep double. So crowded as to be unhealthy. The County Council does nothing. The consequence of the inferior accommodation is that good servants will not stay. (*The Agricultural Labourer*: 157)

Such conditions were the rule rather than the exception at this time, as the evidence of that particular investigation reveals. However, several witnesses continued to defend the system, suggesting that it was not the accommodation itself which was the problem, but rather the manner in which the inhabitants treated it. The factor of the Drummond Castle and Stobhall Estates was adamant that the dwellings provided there were of good condition, but that 'the men treat their bothies very roughly, tear down lather and smash flooring' (ibid.: 154). A fellow witness from Meigle agreed:

The bothies are in most cases well enough constructed, but the difficulty is to get the men to use them properly. (ibid.)

This, it was claimed, was the root of the problem in Scone too:

The construction of the bothies is now, as a rule, very good, but they are disgracefully kept. ... It is in the men's habits that improvement is most needed. (ibid.)

Although many employers were prepared to provide a female servant to clean the bothies, several witnesses insisted that this was made very difficult by the fact that the bothy men resented any interference with what they considered to be their own private space, and often took the key with them to the fields. Thus, Culley asserted that in the Carse of Gowrie in 1867, it was usual for the bothy lads to see to all of their own domestic chores themselves, and only on a few farms were the wives of a neighbouring foreman or cattleman employed to 'redd-up' the bothy (*Fourth Report*: 262). Although we are not told what

recompense these particular women could expect to receive for such work, one Mrs Ramsay was being paid L4-7-8 in Scone in 1897 for cleaning a bothy and doing the men's washing (SLA: Mansfield Estate Accounts Vol 97: 213).

It was generally the bothy men, rather than the employers, however, who attracted the sympathies of the 1917 housing commissioners, for in their view, the untidiness of the bothies was an inevitable consequence of the overcrowding and cramped conditions combined with the length of the working day:

The men have no time for housekeeping. ... Even when they have the ability to cook, they have not the time. ... The fact that all dirty and wet working clothes have to be brought into the room, which is at the same time kitchen and bedroom, that no provision is made for drying clothes, or for proper storage of clothes or other articles, all tend to create a condition of dirt, disorder and discomfort. (*Royal Commission on Housing*, 1917: 171)

The innovation of single room provision was not always as welcome as may have been expected either, for the tradition of sleeping two to each bed was hard to crack. In Methven parish in the 1860s, men were sleeping double even when other beds were vacant: 'I would far rather drop in with another man' remarked one witness (*Fourth Report*: 156). The main problem was a lack of adequate heating, for most of the new single rooms were not equipped with fire places, and according to several *Fourth Report* witnesses, were therefore uninhabitable during the winter months. Others accused their employers of grudging the extra bedding which single apartments necessitated, and so again ended up sleeping double for warmth (e.g. *ibid.*: 160). Indeed, many oral accounts of bothy life within the twentieth century suggest that double beds remained common throughout the entire history of the bothy system within Perthshire.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> One of the bothies in which Will West stayed in the 1930s, for instance, and which he described as being one of the best he ever experienced, still had two double beds and one single for the five occupants (SA 1988.19).



Although they found conditions to be poor, the 1917 commissioners disagreed with the calls being made from some quarters for the bothy system to be abolished by law, for they were realistic enough to realise that the building of individual cottages to re-house the whole bothy population would have been prohibitively expensive for many employers. Furthermore, they reported that the bothy men themselves preferred that system to some of the alternatives, particularly the chaulmer or kitchen system, as the self-catering arrangements of the bothy avoided friction with their employers, and the bothies usually had at least one hearth, a basic necessity missing from most chaulmers. Thus, the commissioners put forward a few basic recommendations which they suggested would bring bothy standards up to an acceptable level. The number of men in each bothy should be limited to a maximum of four; farmers were to make provision for better attendance on the bothy, particularly ensuring that someone undertake more regular and thorough cleaning, and the men were to be encouraged to seek assistance in cooking. The internal walls should be properly finished and sanitary accommodation provided, they suggested. Proper storage for both food and clothes should be insisted upon (they were not impressed with the kists), and where more than two men were to occupy the bothy, separate sleeping space was to be provided, preferably in the form of individual rooms, or through the construction of internal cubicles. 'There is nothing in the nature of the young farm-servant to justify less reasonable standards of housing in his case than those applied to other people' the commissioners concluded (*Royal Commission on Housing* 1917: 179).

These words fell on deaf ears, however, for even by 1936, those undertaking another report on the state of rural housing in Scotland concluded that standards of accommodating unmarried farm servants remained very poor. Unlike their predecessors, they were keen to see the bothy system phased out throughout the country, and discouraged County Councils from offering grant assistance to build new bothies, imploring them instead to channel their funding into the

construction of cottages (*Report on Rural Housing in Scotland 1936/7*: 48-50). Indeed, the report was highly critical of these councils, for under the terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act of 1925, they were responsible for inspecting local housing to ascertain whether any dwelling was unfit for human habitation. Given the number of bothies which the commissioners considered to belong to this category, they concluded that no such inspections were being carried out.

It seems that the 1936/7 report may indeed have been a catalyst for the disappearance of the bothy system, for oral testimony suggests that there was a sharp decline in its use, at least in Perthshire, following World War Two. This was probably more to do with falling numbers of farm servants, than with better provision of cottages, however.

### *Food and Domestic Arrangements*

#### **CD Track 6**

GW: So how many would usually be in a bothy?

WW: ... Well sometimes you know you'd hae two, you hae three, you hae four, sometimes five, sometimes six, depends on the size o the farm, and it was just the same as the horse in the stable, you'd a your own - just yer own bowl, own jug, and a plate and a fork and a knife, and your ain place at the table, yer ain place on the long wooden form there used to be, yer ain place there. A'thing was individual, and if you was the first ... man in the bothy - like say second man, second, third and fourth and a cattle man or whatever there was - you start yer week on pan on Saturday at denner time. It was arranged atween the men in there - if it was four men - that you would buy the breakfast on Sunday mornin for four men. Which would be two pound o ham, or two pound o sausages, half a pound a piece we used to have (laughs) or eggs you see. And you bought the tea for the rest o the week. You went off the followin Saturday at denner time, emptied the ash place which gathered for a week (laughs) - the fire hardly was ever oot. It was always banked up and the pot and the kettle sat at the side. You took the ashes and swept up and a the rest o it you see, and that was him off. The next boy came on and he had to supply the breakfast, you know that was their routine. You got supplied from the farmer with yer meal, salt, and soap, and yer towels, and yer beddin of course, which the pillow cases was made oot of flour sacks - rough linen flour sacks that they got their flour in, and

they made the pillow covers. No sheets, just the bare blankets. The bed was made up o horse mattresses, and what they ca'd a tyke, a caff tyke on the top o them. It was filled up wi chaff off the mill. Clean chaff. By God it was warm, min. Oh aye, and you know after you'd filled it up you were near to the ceilin, you ken, you needit a ladder tae get in, but it soon settled doon. Usually it was just two double beds, one end and a but built onto the steadin or somethin like that. That was the bothy. (SA 1988.19)

The essential difference between the bothy system and other means of housing unmarried farm servants was of course the fact that the bothy was a self-catering form of accommodation, and as such, the workers had to cook for themselves. Given the strict gender divisions of labour which we have seen in chapter two concerning domestic work, it is paradoxical that those whose daily duties primarily involved the most exclusively-male task of ploughing, found themselves returning to their bothies each evening to engage in what was essentially regarded as women's work. It is perhaps for this reason that the bothy diet earned such a reputation for monotony and lack of imagination, based as it was on oatmeal, milk products, and very little else:

DM: Well ye got up tae yer horse at six o'clock maybe, half past five, and if there wis two or three o ye on the farm, there wis one always what you called on pan. He was the cook. He made the porridge, by the time you was sortin the horses. He made the porridge, that wis yer breakfast, and then ye had cauld porridge at dinner time, that wis a change, you see! Then you'd anither change at night - you got a feed o brose! (Dave MacDonald, SC 1986.16)

This situation had remained unchanged for many generations, for it had brought a heartfelt plea from a local doctor in a speech delivered to the Errol ploughmen in 1863:

I don't think there is any man here who scunners at beef or dislikes good bread. Tell me therefore, my men, why you don't have beef in your bothies? and particularly, why you don't have loaf bread? ... And am I to be told that in a bothy with five or six stout, active and sensible young men not one can be got amongst them to cook a plain, simple meal? ... That a man in turn cannot undertake the cooking of a few simple meals, to make the whole of the inmates of the bothy comfortable and to keep, in his turn, the bothy as clean as the farmhouse, is a downright shame. It

is in your power. (Dr Norman MacLeod, reported in *Perthshire Courier*, March 31st, 1863)

MacLeod was speaking at one of the regular evening classes which Lord Kinnaird had established for the Carse of Gowrie farm servants with a view to improving their academic and moral education. By 1864, there were said to be around 250 individuals attending (*ibid.*: Feb 2nd, 1864). If Macleod's lecture is at all representative of the flavour of these classes, condescending philanthropy was the order of the day. As well as imploring the servants to improve their diet, the doctor attacked their apathy and conservative outlooks which prevented them from breaking away from the inherited conventions of the bothy culture. The bothy lads were actually 'murdering' themselves, he claimed, simply by following the customs 'handed down from father to son'. Failure to wear a 'Macintosh' to the fields on a wet day was one such folly:

... for his father never did so, and no ploughman ever did so, and so he comes in and sits down in his soaking clothes before the bothy fire, and he steams like a wet blanket with the heat, and there he sits just sucking in rheumatism and heart complaint, and diseases of a similar nature. (*ibid.*: March 31st, 1863)

MacLeod would have been horrified indeed if he knew that some three generations later, very little had changed!

In the twentieth century, the daily routines, internal divisions of labour, self-entertainment methods and general etiquette within the bothies seem to have shown very little regional or temporal variation. This was probably due partly to the conservatism outlined by Dr MacLeod, but also the itinerant lifestyle of the bothy lads who would usually move on every six months in search of an improved bargain. This population movement would have resulted in a corresponding process of culture transfer between bothies - an 'averaging out' of acceptable forms of cultural behaviour. Thus, while every individual of course has his particular story to tell, as far as the general *structure* of bothy life is



concerned, these stories show a marked uniformity and match a recognisable common template.

This template has been meticulously described by David Adams in relation to Angus and Kincardineshire (1991) and as such, requires little expansion here. Furthermore, the largely self-explanatory testimonies of several of the Perthshire informants recorded for this thesis, particularly those of Dave West, Will West, and Dave MacDonald are included in full in the appendices below, and reveal striking similarities to Adams' ethnography. The rigid rotation of domestic duties, whereby each man took a weekly turn 'on pan', rising early each morning to make the porridge for everyone; the fact that brose making was however the responsibility of each individual; the Sunday morning fry-up, bought and prepared by the lad 'on-pan'; the manner in which the bowls were held when making and eating brose (in the cup of the hand, and never with the thumb over the rim);<sup>79</sup> the ubiquitous presence of a musical instrument, usually either a fiddle or melodeon; the song parodies of farm life and anti-employer rhetoric in the form of the bothy ballad; the games of strength; the Saturday night visits to the nearest town: all these were features of bothy life which showed a remarkable continuity throughout Perthshire and well beyond.

To what extent all this deserves to be labelled a 'sub-culture' is a point which is explored below.

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<sup>79</sup> 'Ye held the bowl in the palm o your hand. If you put yer thumb over the rim o the bowl ye got a rap over .. from a spoon fae somebody else. ..We were clutterin the flair. That was the regulations in the bothy. Hold the bowl in the palm of the hand. Put the meal in wi yer hand .. some salt, some pepper and a bit o margarine. And stirred it with the handle o the spoon - no the bit you supped in, but the handle... (Will West, Heartland FM, 10.3.95). On the other side of the Angus border this convention followed an identical form: 'Ye held the bowel be the flange at the boddam. If ye pit yer thoom ower the rim of the bowel ye wid get an affa rap ower the finger wi anither lad's spuin. Ye just werena supposed tae haud yer bowel that wye, and that's a' there wis about it ...' (Adams 1991: 36).



## A Bothy Sub-Culture?

### *Establishment Attitudes*

While many farmers within the *carse* and *haugh* areas of Perthshire embraced the bothy system as a cheap and efficient means of housing their outdoor servants, their actions did not go unchallenged, for throughout its entire existence, the system proved to be the focal point for much external criticism. The clergy in particular saw the bothy existence as a 'world apart' and found very little of value in its use, proving incessant in their calls for it to be replaced with an arrangement which would be more conducive to the fostering of moral fibre in the servants in their parishes. Indeed, it is rare to find a reference to the bothy in print without the word sparking off a vehement critical diatribe by its clerical author: claims that the system was 'most hurtful to morality' (*Fourth Report: Caputh* 1867) for failing to keep the servants 'under the restraints and proprieties of family life' (ibid.: Errol) appear regularly in the sources. Certainly, the clergy were given more than their fair share of platforms to air their views, for much of the source material available on this general theme was of course compiled by the ministers of the established church, and increasingly after 1843, of the Free Church also. A distorted view it may be, but there can be no doubt as to the strength of their feelings against the fashion. The views of the minister of Auchtergaven parish may be taken as being fairly typical:

It is to be regretted, however, that the moral improvement of the ploughmen has not kept pace with that of the land which they know so well how to cultivate. The bothy system may be regarded as the main cause of this. Young men associate together in an outhouse of the farm, cook their own victuals, which is generally oatmeal, brose and milk. Thus, they never meet in a domestic capacity, spend much of their time, especially in winter, not under the inspection of their masters, and the bad tend to corrupt the good. (NSA Vol X: 451)

Once again, it appears to be the fact that the servants no longer spent time in the farmhouse in a family-style setting which most upsets this author, implying that he was familiar with a time when servants in the area were in more frequent social and domestic contact with their employers. Their reasoning, it seems, was

that without the sobering and steady influence of the family to guide them, the young lads were bound to be tempted into the ways of the devil by the odd bad spirit among them.

That same year, 1838, the minister of Longforgan parish expressed the opinion that the numerous bothies there had

certainly not contributed to the formation of pious and virtuous habits. It is among them that the greatest ignorance is most commonly to be found, and that cases of immorality do most commonly occur. (ibid.: 412)

In 1843, the minister of Stanley parish lamented the use there of the 'ruinous' bothy system (Poor Law Report Vol 23), while to his colleague in Tibbermore it was the 'curse of the district' (ibid.). To the Rev. Mr Marshall of Caputh writing in 1867, the overcrowding of bothies resulted in 'a great amount of indecent exposure and want of cleanliness' (*Fourth Report* 1867).

One of the most damning criticisms of the alleged evils of the bothy system, however, came from the Rev. John Murdoch in a letter to the editor of the Perthshire Courier on May 14th 1860:

Sir :- Yesterday I went down the Carse of Gowrie with the Rev. Dr Begg to inspect the bothies in which farm servants are there lodged: and on first sight of the thing and hearing explanations, I at once felt fully convinced that the mighty wanderings, thieving, and immoralities of such men are not to be wondered at. Cut off from all the sympathies and society of their fellow men they not unnaturally regard all mankind as their enemies: and all nightly plunderings they can make they regard as lawful spoil to them from the enemy. Removed in their yearly wanderings from place to place, they know no fixed religious teachers: the fear of God is effaced if ever it was implanted in them; and they naturally seek impure and immoral pleasures whenever they can find them.

This list of accusations is dramatic enough, but Murdoch did not stop there. His tirade continues in the next paragraph in which he goes on to suggest that this hellish brigade were not only destroying their own moral health, but that they were also poisoning the rest of society. Any moral indiscretion from anybody, it

would seem, could be traced back to the bothy door. Half the parish were on their way to damnation, and it was all due to the introduction of the bothy system:

These outcast men and women, after having spent their early youth in such immoral and Godless practices, at length marry and bring up a race of children after their own kind. These girls, when grown up, get situations as servants in their nurseries, and carrying thither with them all their own impure practices, the children even of pious parents are secretly corrupted, and even in youth trained to vice by which their own souls are endangered and the hearts of their parents broken. (ibid.)

Murdoch was by no means alone in holding such extreme opinions. This particular letter, for instance, would almost certainly have been influenced by his companion on that excursion to the Carse of Gowrie bothies, for the Rev. Dr James Begg was one of the most outspoken critics of the period as regards the evils of poor social conditions in general and of the bothy system in particular, using the pages of the Free Church newspaper, *The Witness*, as his soap box. From his own rural parish of Liberton on the south side of Edinburgh, Begg made regular excursions north to the main bothy areas of the country in order to gather the incriminating evidence he required to prove his case. His basic belief was that a good many of the ills which dogged rural society would be overcome if farmers and landowners abandoned their bothies and provided decent alternative accommodation for their servants. Two years before this particular visit to Perthshire, Begg had concluded that the bothy system was the major cause of 'drunkenness, profligacy and crime' and that there was a strong connection between this form of housing and high illegitimacy rates among the rural populace (*The Witness* January 23 1858). This latter claim was based upon Begg's inaccurate analysis of the newly-available statistics from the Registrar General for Scotland, a development made possible by the implementation of the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act of 1854. Begg was horrified by the figures which appeared to reveal that Scotland's illegitimacy rate of nine births per hundred was higher than that of England and many other

European nations.<sup>80</sup> However, Begg focused his attention on the huge variation in the figures for Scotland: many rural areas had much higher rates than most towns, a fact which Begg pounced upon in order to argue that his long-held hypothesis that the bothy system was to blame was indeed correct.<sup>81</sup> As T.C Smout has pointed out, however, Begg's interpretation of the statistics was flawed, for in fact two of the areas with the highest illegitimacy rates in Scotland - the north-east and the south-west - did not tend to use the bothy system at all, but favoured the chaulmer or kitchen system whereby the servants were more likely to come into social and domestic contact with their employers (Smout 1986: 166).<sup>82</sup> Indeed, this was a point noted at the time by at least one Perthshire landowner, for Mr George Muirhead, an occupier in Kilspindie parish writing in 1867, was certainly aware that the Registrar General's figures on illegitimacy showed no direct link between high rates and the bothy areas (*Fourth Report*: 79).

That Begg was wrong matters little, however, for he succeeded in bringing these issues to the forefront of public debate, and it is therefore with this climate in mind that we must view Murdoch's letter to the Perth-based press.<sup>83</sup> His comments may seem sensationalist and exaggerated now, but they would

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<sup>80</sup> It later became clear that the English figures were inaccurate and that they were in fact much closer to those north of the Border.

<sup>81</sup> In the Registrar General's report for 1861-62, it was stated that 'Unlike all the Continental States, it would seem now to be established that the proportion of illegitimate Births is less in the Town than in the Country Districts of Scotland' (p.3)

<sup>82</sup> In 1855 a teenage girl in Banffshire was statistically more than twenty times as likely to have an illegitimate child as a girl in Ross and Cromarty. As Carter demonstrates (1979: 126), bothies were virtually unknown in Banffshire, while Hugh Miller was certainly familiar with this mode of housing servants in his native Cromarty (see his essay 'The Bothy System' in *The Witness* 22 September 1841 and also *My Schools and Schoolmasters* Edinburgh 1889: 115-118).

<sup>83</sup> Begg seems to have been influential in persuading the authorities to include a question in the 1861 Census which would enable indoor servants (i.e. those living under the farmhouse roof) to be distinguished from outdoor servants. Unfortunately the question did not distinguish between bothy dwellers and married servants living in cottages and so the move was virtually useless (Carter 1979: 120).



undoubtedly have served to maintain the moral pressure on the employers, however contentious these claims may have been.<sup>84</sup>

The clergy did not have things all their own way, though, for not all contemporary commentators agreed that the bothy system was so intrinsically damaging to the moral health of those who were accommodated within it, and many defended its continued use. One Breadalbane landowner turned the tables on the clergy by claiming that it was actually they who were to blame for falling moral standards among the farm servant population and not their system of accommodation:

‘The immorality of Scotland is not occasioned by agricultural employment, but proceeds from the laziness of the clergymen in not doing their duty in inculcating and preserving good morals, and prompting a better tone among the labouring classes’ (Sir Robert Menzies, *Fourth Report*: 67).

George Richmond, a landowner and occupier from Auchterarder, asserted in 1867 that the bothy system existed in that parish ‘with no worse effect ... to morality than any other system of lodging farm servants’ (*Fourth Report*: 69). Another occupier writing that year from Kilspindie parish considered it rather unfair to blame all the bothy dwellers for the sins of a few, and felt it unjust to ‘inveigh against the bothymen as the cause of the immorality alleged to be so prevalent in the country districts’. (ibid.: 79)

It is of little surprise that most of the voices which set out to defend the practice of housing unmarried servants in bothies belonged to the landowners, for it was normally their responsibility to provide suitable living quarters on their farms, and bothies were undoubtedly a cheap means of doing so; the buildings

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<sup>84</sup> The Free Synod of Perth appears to have been more balanced in its conclusions on this subject. While agreeing that the farm servant population of the county was not given to following a particularly pious lifestyle, the Synod took the view that the servants simply *shared* in the ‘general decay of religious earnestness’ which characterised the period, but were not the *cause* of it. Indeed, they admitted that they could offer no suitable alternative suggestions which could improve upon the bothy system (reported in the *Perthshire Courier*, November 4th 1879).





**Photograph 3.a**  
*Bothy Lads at Mains of Condie, Forgandenny*  
 Scottish Life Archive, National Museums of Scotland, c9561



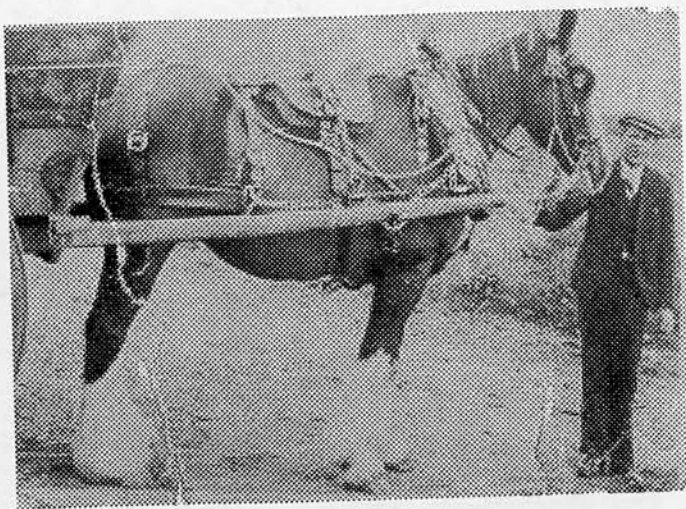
**Photograph 3.b**  
*Ploughmen and Horses, Kirkton of Collace, Kinrossie, 1928*  
 Scottish Life Archive, National Museums of Scotland, c7392



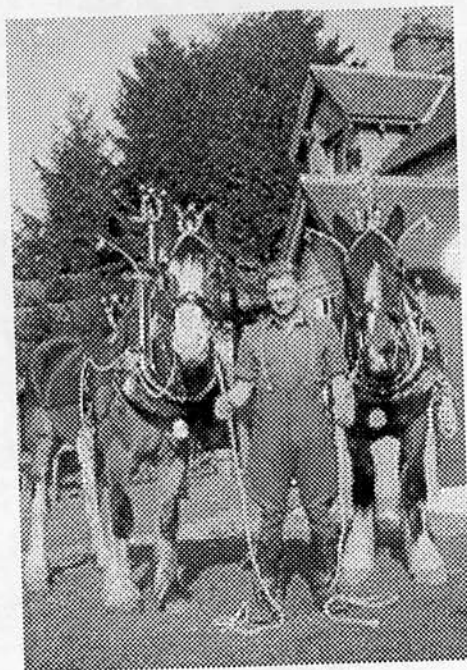
**Photograph 3.c**  
*Will West, Foreman at Hallhale, 1940*  
 Far Right with Chance and Charlie  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 3.d**  
*Dave West, c. 1930*  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 3.e**  
*Dave West With Cart Horse, c. 1930*  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 3.f**  
*Will West, Balnabeggan With Jim and Bett, c. 1943*  
*West Family Collection*





**Photograph 3.g**  
*Will West at Ploughing Match, Feb 1946*  
*West Family Collection*



**Photograph 3.h**  
*Willie Smith at Ploughing Match, Binchill, 1924*  
*Scottish Life Archive, National Museums of Scotland c10530*

themselves were small and basic, and fewer kitchen staff were required in the farmhouse if the outdoor servants cooked for themselves. Cottages, which may well have been preferred by clergy and ploughmen alike, were of course very expensive and as a result were very scarce in Perthshire. The responses to question 24 in the Poor Law Enquiry of 1843, as outlined above, clearly point to a shortage of this type of individualised accommodation, a situation which had not greatly improved by the final decade of the nineteenth century. Of the evidence statements from East Perthshire given to the 1893 Royal Commission on Labour, seventeen of the twenty-one responses made specific reference to an accommodation shortage for married servants.<sup>85</sup> Employing single men (and occasionally women) housed together in a bothy was the most economic answer in the eyes of the landowners.

It is understandable, then, why the landowning community would wish to defend the bothy system, but it is perhaps less clear just why the clergy would seek to criticise it quite so vehemently. Certainly, Begg's role must be given a degree of credit here, for his tireless campaigning and infectious enthusiasm for the cause could not have failed to influence many of his peers. But was Begg completely misguided? What lay at the root of his initial suspicions? Were the servants really so lacking in moral fibre? What did they actually get up to in order to attract all this attention?

The answers to these questions may well remain elusive, and indeed are largely outwith the scope of this study. Nonetheless, it would be naive to suggest that the unsupervised unmarried servants in the bothy environment would not have taken advantage of the freedom the system afforded them, indulging in activities which the clergy would have found distasteful at best. Most bothy lads appear to have resented any interference with their quarters or their private life, and while

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<sup>85</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour, 1893-94, Parliamentary Papers Vol XXXVI, Report on the Arable Districts of Forfarshire and East Perthshire*. The Perthshire parishes were Dunblane, Crieff, Perth, Collace, Meigle, Inchtute, Errol and Auchterarder. The Perthshire evidence consists of twenty-one statements, some submitted by single contributors, others from groups.



on some farms the grieves were expected to exercise discipline outwith working hours, this was not usually taken too seriously, and the bothy dwellers were normally free to indulge in their 'nocturnal roving habits' to their hearts' content.<sup>86</sup>

One source which can shed some light on the consequences of 'nocturnal roving habits' among the farm servants is the Kirk Session Minutes which prove to be a gold mine for the voyeuristic historian of such matters. Anybody who was suspected of being involved in 'ante-nuptial fornication' was brought before this local body of moral police and made to answer for his or her sins. The church had been seriously censuring moral sinners since the Reformation, although by the time the first bothies were appearing a combination of Moderate Party dominance and a rapidly increasing Scottish population had led to something of a breakdown of church control over such matters. During the evangelical revival of the nineteenth century, though, the more fundamentalist brand of presbyterians in post-Disruption Scotland were setting about their moral crusade with renewed vigour.<sup>87</sup>

A preliminary survey of a random selection of nineteenth century kirk session minutes for Perthshire certainly appears to add fuel to the claims that farm servants were often involved in such cases, but there is no strong evidence to suggest either that they were disproportionately represented or indeed that the bothy areas were any worse than those which relied on some other system of accommodation.<sup>88</sup> What does seem clear, though, is that many young country lads enjoyed their first sexual encounters while living in the bothy, and as the

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<sup>86</sup> This phrase formed part of the Rev. Mr Davidson's evidence to the *Fourth Report Enquiry* team of 1867. Referring to Kinfauns, he claimed that the bothy system 'contaminates them with vicious example; leads to bastardy and nocturnal roving habits; tends to make them restless and given to change their service'.

<sup>87</sup> For a detailed discussion of this theme see Boyd 1980.

<sup>88</sup> A much more detailed survey of these records would have to be conducted in order to reach any solid conclusions on this topic. This was outside the scope of the research for the present study and as such the points made here should be treated as tentative suggestions only.

frequency of paternity cases dealt with by the kirk sessions shows, the sad consequence for many of their sexual partners was an unplanned child.

There can be little doubt, then, that the establishment, especially in the guise of the church, viewed the bothy system as a sub-culture within local society which required to be stamped out. It was the very *idea* of the system which troubled it, for it stood in sharp contrast to the model household of 'the family', the best and perhaps only preserver of moral order. And yet, the clergy's worries went deeper than 'ante-nuptial fornication' prevention, for there was another ingredient in the sub-culture which must have seemed altogether more sinister than youthful bed-hopping.

### *Horsemanship*

It is reasonable to conclude that the standards of morality displayed by the bothy lads did not come up to those expected by the clergy, but it is unlikely that this alone would have given them reason enough to react as strongly as they did to the continued use of the bothy system. The trend which probably gave them greatest cause for concern was the growing anti-establishment flavour of the bothy sub-culture - an independence of thought and mind which became manifest in a variety of ways as the nineteenth century wore on and the twentieth century arrived. Both increasing unionisation (especially after 1912) and the earlier emergence of a popular self-penned tradition of song protest almost certainly served to unsettle the church, but it was more likely to be the goings-on of the secret society of horsemen - the Horseman's Word - with its diabolic ritualism and anti-authority philosophy which caused the most heightened panic in the manse. The veil of secrecy which cloaked the 'otherworld' of the ploughmen's existence would have served only to sharpen the suspicions and discomfort of the parish ministers, for no doubt the snippets of tales in common currency around the *fermtouns* would have exaggerated the devil-worship elements of the

initiation ceremony which some of the members themselves now often dismiss as little more than a bit of fun.

The phenomenon of 'The Word' has been discussed at reasonable length elsewhere, and requires little in the way of further development here.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, it is essential to point out that The Society was not only active in the well-documented north-east region, but also continued to be an important focus for Perthshire farm servants well into the twentieth century, and only really died with the disappearance from the farms of its *raison d'être* - the working horses - in the middle decades of the century. And yet its power lives on still, for there is an overt reluctance - or indeed outright refusal - among many members to talk about the Word in anything but the most general of terms. Witness Will West's response to a rather unsympathetic community radio interviewer:

#### **CD Track 7**

JR: And did you break the horses yourselves?

WW: I've had my session at that as well, no there, no at that place.

JR: And this is, what a year old colt?

WW: Oh no no, they were risin three maybe, risin four, afore they were broken. It didnae do tae break them too young. They never got developed right, matured right if they were broken too young.

JR: And how do you go about breaking a plough horse?

WW: Oh, I cannae tell ye that min!

JR:[laughing] Why not?

WW: [not laughing] Because it's one o these things a horseman keeps tae himself.

JR: And how did you learn it, then, if a horseman keeps it to himself?

WW: Cause I was learned how to dae it, by older men.

JR: And who are you going to pass it on to though?

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<sup>89</sup> See Adams 1991, Carter 1979, Davidson 1956, Sprott 1996. Hamish Henderson's collecting work in the north-east of Scotland has provided a large body of oral material relating to the Horseman's Word phenomenon, most of which is housed in the SSS archive (SA 1952.11; SA 1952.14; SA 1952.16; SA 1952.19; SA1952.20; SA 1952.25; SA 1952.94; SA 1952.97; SA 1952.99; SA 1953.15; SA 1960.56; SA 1961.40; SA 1961.41). Some of this material is dealt with in Henderson 1980 in which he refers to the Horseman's Word as a 'kind of cross between a farm servant freemasonry, a working-class Hellfire Club, and a "primitive rebel" trade union (84) and suggests that it evolved from two earlier cults called the Ploughman's Word and the Miller's Word, both of which were 'custodians of diabolism' (ibid. 102).

WW: Well, I've nobody to pass it on to, but I've intentions o writin it on a letter and givin it to my son to keep. I've only the one son, who's a bank manager in Dundee. (Heartland FM 10.3.95)

Elsewhere in the same interview, when asked about The Word, he remarks, 'No, no. I cannae indulge in that at a'. Will, then, is obviously from that breed of horsemen who continue to take their vows of secrecy very seriously indeed. He knows full well that his son is unlikely to find a use for the secrets he holds, but values the tradition enough to at least attempt to provide it a life line into the next generation.

This attitude is most revealing, for it demonstrates the surviving status of certain features of the bothy culture in the eyes of at least one individual who spent a significant proportion of his formative years eating, sleeping and thinking this way of life. The Word was part of his culture and his experience, and it was not something that was to be dismissed lightly or shared with anyone who was not in some way an insider. Will is proud to be a horseman, is acutely aware of the tradition of which he forms a part, and rises above attempts to goad him into divulging any of the secrets of his former trade. His father and several of his brothers also had The Word, but those of his brothers who grew up after the horses had gone - my father amongst them - had no need of these skills and did not go 'through the mill'. Even they were not considered suitable recipients of any of the secrets regarding the rituals and ways of the horsemen.

Will was by no means alone in his reluctance to speak of the Horseman's Word. Of the many recordings made by Hamish Henderson housed in the archive of the School of Scottish Studies which address this topic, the informants can be categorised into three main classes: those who will talk openly and candidly of the Society, those who part with only a few snippets of information about their activities, and those who divulge virtually nothing at all. Of the latter, the following is fairly typical (SA 1952.94):



HH: We were havin a talk, Bill, about the Horseman's Word, and the old ceremonies to do wi that.  
 WF: Oh, gee ..  
 HH: Were you ever put through it yoursel?  
 WF: Eh? Oh aye, mony a time.  
 HH: You were?  
 WF: [Laughs]. But a wouldnie start that noo. No.  
 HH: Would you no?  
 LH: It's all away through noo, ye ken.  
 HH: You wouldnie start it?  
 WF: No. I've bin minister<sup>90</sup> in there an a' but ...  
 HH: Oh, were you minister? Oh well. It's all finished now anyway.  
 WF: Oh aye, it's all finished. Nae use onywey.  
 HH: There's no the tractorman's word now!  
 WF: No, no.  
 HH: Where were you minister though, Will?  
 WF: A would never say the like o that noo.

Others, though, look back at the secret ceremony in which they were involved and (publicly at least) dismiss it as little more than a way of spending an evening, and pass off the oaths and the practice of 'shakin hands with the Deevil' as mere 'bunkum'.<sup>91</sup> It is in such cases, however, that we must move cautiously in the field of oral history, for these men were presenting their memories many years after the events themselves, and in a very different social and cultural climate to the one they had known in the bothies. Fully aware that those listening in to their taped conversations may well think such actions strange or weird, they may have chosen to play down their own feelings. This, of course, we cannot tell for sure, but it is important that we are at least sensitive towards such possibilities.

Whatever the retrospective attitudes may reveal, there can be little doubt that for at least a century, the Horseman's Word acted as a central mark of identity for male ploughmen in Perthshire and indeed far beyond, and was a principal

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<sup>90</sup> The 'minister' was the senior horseman present at the ceremonies who conducted the 'service' and generally took charge of the proceedings. The quasi-religious tones of the Society, then, would have done little to endear the members to the parish clergy proper.

<sup>91</sup> This dismissive term was used for instance by George 'Lordie' Hay when talking to Hamish Henderson about his experiences as a Horseman on SA 1952/14.



ingredient in the forging of a distinct bothy sub-culture. Of course, not all horsemen in Perthshire lived in bothies, for once they were married and moved up the housing hierarchy into a family cottage, they did not resign their membership. Nonetheless, the bothy was the hub of the movement, and for many, the rite of passage of entering bothy life as a young lad still in the throes of puberty, was followed fairly quickly by the rather more formidable passage into horsemanship.

The clandestine and ritualistic nature of this passage served to cement the experience in the initiates' minds and memories, and reinforced the philosophy that the ploughmen were 'different' - that they were unique within the structure of local rural society, kings among labourers. But it was a tough journey getting there. The young hopefuls would be summoned to attend their initiation after dark in some out-of-the-way barn somewhere in the district, and would be taken there by existing members once the way was clear (often when the farmhouse lights had gone off). The 'minister' was already inside, and as the members arrived they would go through some form of ritual before being allowed to enter. In some cases this involved knocking three times on the door and correctly responding to the questions posed from inside:

'Who's there?'

'A Brother'.

'What of?'

'Horsemanship.'

'How am I to know that?'

'I've often been tried and never been denied and willing to be tried again.'

'Ah well, pass in friend.'<sup>92</sup>

Those who were attending for the first time, of course, knew nothing of this process and were guided inside and then blindfolded, ready for their initiation to

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<sup>92</sup>This was the text as recalled by Lordie Hay on SA 1952/14. The exact wording would vary through time and space, however. A more complex variant is cited by Henderson in Cowan 1980: 98-99.

commence. It was common for the 'victim' to be told to remove some articles of clothing - perhaps one boot and one sock - and to kneel on the ground with his arms stretched above his head. The minister would then deliver his 'sermon', warning of the dangers of ever giving away any of the Society's secrets, and would instruct the initiate to take an oath. In most oral accounts, it has been claimed that the lad would then be given the actual 'word' which could be used to control a horse, and this was never to be written down, although some informants claim that no such word existed. Their first test came immediately, for they were given a pencil and told to write down what they had just been told to check whether they remembered it. Having just promised never to write it though, compliance brought trouble, and many were given a blow from a fist or even a chain as punishment, and as a reminder of their oath. Before graduating into the world of the horsemen, the initiates finally had to 'tak a shak o auld horny' - shake hands with the ultimate horseman, the Devil. Still blindfolded, their outstretched hand came into contact with a hoof (usually of some unsuspecting goat) and the bargain was complete. Little wonder, then, that the clergy felt greatly threatened by the bothy system and the culture it nurtured.

Whatever membership of The Word can be said to signify, there can be little doubt that the working horse remained a central symbol of the male farm servant's way of life during the entire post-improvement period within Perthshire, even after it had been replaced by tractor power. The pride and emotion with which Will West speaks when enthusing about his days working with horses is unequivocal:

**CD Track 8**

JR: Did you look on your horses as loved animals or ... it wasn't like a tractor at all?

WW: Oh no no no. You could just get them tae speak tae ye, min.

JR: What kind of horses did you use?

WW: Clydesdales, mostly.

JR: Do you remember any of them by name?

WW: Them all. Every one that a drove, I could tell you their name.

JR: Start at the beginning and let's hear them.

WW: Dick, Muss, Tink, Charlie, Dan, Sport, Jimmy, Nell, Jock, Prince, Punch, Chance, Charlie, Nigger, Punch again, Tip, Nell again, and Jock and Tam.

JR: Which was your favourite?

WW: Punch.

JR: Why?

WW: I don't know. He wis a show beast, pit it that way. He could just walk at the right pace and set heself and he'd good markins, good body, good legs, you know...

Other Guest: You must have cared a lot about them to have remembered their names all this time.

WW: Oh aye. Just loved them. (Heartland FM 10.3.95)

Compare this with Will's outright dismissal of more modern forms of 'horsepower':

JR: You look back and you sound as if you loved those days.

WW: Oh yes, I did.

JR: Why did you leave it then?

WW: Because I didnae like the tractors. Simple as that. I've ploughed wi them, drilled wi them, did everything, but sittin on a tractor on a cauld windy day, it is the worst job on earth. (ibid.)

### *Competition*

Although by definition ploughmen were working with horses virtually on a daily basis and their reputations were thus governed largely by the standard of their routine work, there is little doubt that the ultimate manifestation of their horsemanship within the public eye was the ploughing match. Organised by sub-committees of the local Agricultural Societies, these were certainly an important source of social interaction and recreation for ploughmen throughout the country, but they were certainly not treated merely as 'a day out' and the chance to escape the monotonies of the daily work routines. They may have fulfilled such roles, certainly, but most of these gatherings were fiercely competitive occasions for which the entrants began to prepare weeks beforehand, cleaning and polishing harness with an enthusiasm which belied the state of their bothies.

Highly detailed accounts of the organisation and workings of the Perthshire ploughing matches are provided in several of the interview transcriptions contained in the appendices below.

The ploughing match was a social and professional leveller: it provided the platform for ploughmen to break away from the strict hierarchies of the farm workforce, where just about every aspect of the daily routine was governed by rank. A man would never dream of leaving the stable in the morning before his seniors; a second ploughman could never work faster than the man on the first pair, at least not without serious reprisals.<sup>93</sup> On the competition field, however, it was not seniority that mattered, but simply the levels of skill demonstrated by each man whatever his position. This strict ranking system which operated on the farms served to stifle any internal competitiveness which may have arisen through human nature, ensuring the maintenance of order and discipline and therefore a smooth working environment. In a sense the matches provided a release from this, and the chance for the senior men to justify their positions and the more junior lads to prove themselves worthy of higher esteem.

### **The Bothy System - Closing Remarks**

Use of the bothy system was widespread throughout the *carse* and *haugh* regions of Perthshire during the post-improvement period. Following its genesis during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it quickly became symbolic of the new social order, and was a material manifestation of the emerging gulf between master and servant as the latter were moved out of the farmhouse and into the steading. Farm servant identity (and later, memory) focused firmly upon the bothy as a symbol of independence and pride, and it

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<sup>93</sup> As Will West explained, 'And you darn't move till the foreman moved. You stayed behind him all the time. He'd tae go oot the stable first, intae the stable first, it was him that fed the - corned the horses' (SA 1988.19). Will also recalls a case where the second ploughman thought himself better than the first, and demonstrated this symbolically by starting work before him after their break for dinner. The more senior man left his post immediately, obviously feeling unable to continue having lost his self-respect. (Heartland FM, 10.3.95)

provided a physical and psychological setting around which a strong sub-culture could be shaped. To a certain extent, this culture was shared by all male farm servants, irrespective of their marital status and corresponding accommodation, but it was the bothy which remained at the centre of this cultural identity, a fact noted by insiders and outsiders alike. For those on the outside looking in, the bothy and its cultural constructions were a threat to moral and social order, a fear which to them was realised through sexual permissiveness, a bawdy and irreverent song tradition, an absence of piety and regular pacts with the devil.

To those on the inside, its spartan space but cultural richness summed up their farming experiences in a much more positive way, and if oral testimony is to be believed, for many, the bothy represented the best days of their lives.



# **PART B**

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD**

# PROLOGUE

## COMMUNAL LABOUR SYSTEMS

Like 'community', 'neighbourhood' is a concept which has attracted many scholarly attempts at definition. There is general consensus amongst geographers, who tend to emphasise the spatial connotations of the word, that in physical terms neighbourhood is smaller than community (Pacione 1983; Gold 1980) while sociologists and anthropologists have been less concerned with scale, focusing on neighbourhood as a form of cognitive construction or *feeling* (Bulmer 1986; Cohen 1982; Mewett 1982). The roots of this feeling - this belonging - are complex and span a range of social and cultural forms. Within the Scottish context, several traditions and customs have been identified as contributing to a sense of neighbourhood. To Lyle (1998: 8-10) neighbourhood in the past was defined in many communities as being those of 'one fire', a reference to the custom of extinguishing all household fires at Beltane and re-lighting them from a single source, the needfire. Settlements could also be divided geographically into neighbourhoods which competed for the available luck for the coming year according to the concept of 'limited good' (Foster: 1965: 296-7; Simpson 1996:15). The 'ba' games' still played each year in Jedburgh and other Border towns as well as in Kirkwall require the population to divide into neighbourhoods for this purpose (Lyle 1998: 13-14).

In the following chapters, I argue that in rural Perthshire, neighbourhood was a central concept in the collective mindset of the farming folk there, and was built around the tradition of *neighbouring* - non-waged, communal work practices involving members of separate agricultural units. I point to the importance of mutual aid both as a means of coping with economic insecurity and in the mental construction of neighbourhood as a form of cognitive space and category of belonging (Relph 1976: 24).

The role of communal labour within pre-improvement Perthshire agriculture has already been discussed briefly in Chapter One. However, research for this thesis has clearly shown that the concept of agricultural units sharing or pooling labour resources for certain tasks by no means disappeared with the widespread abolition of multiple- and joint-tenancies in the late eighteenth century. This particular aspect of a locally organised, 'organic' informal economy survived and indeed in some cases developed right through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the second half of the current century has witnessed a major decline in the reliance of the farming community upon mutual assistance arrangements, there is some evidence to suggest that since the 1980s, this phenomenon has begun to re-establish itself, for a limited number of tasks at least. This trend is addressed below.

#### *Towards a Theoretical Model of Communal Labour*

To date, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been paid to the theme of communal labour within a Scottish context, although it should be noted that this is certainly in keeping with the paucity of studies on this topic within Britain and indeed within Europe as a whole. While a few scholars have carried out important and influential research on communal, and especially reciprocal labour arrangements within the developed West, we really have to look to the work of anthropologists operating largely within the 'developing' world in order to gain a fuller understanding of the development and current state of knowledge regarding this potentially very complex aspect of labour organisation.

I am aware of the dangers of borrowing theories derived from research within pre-industrial societies and applying them 'wholesale' to nineteenth and twentieth century Scotland, without making any allowances for the vastly different cultural and economic climates within which these societies operate. I share the worries of those who have criticised the opinions of evolutionists such as Redfield, who in 1947 concluded

Understanding of society in general and our own urbanised society in particular can be gained through consideration of the societies least like our own: the primitive, or folk, societies. (1947: 293-308)<sup>94</sup>

Nonetheless, the body of literature comprising ethnographies and analyses arising from these anthropological investigations cannot be ignored. While avoiding any temptation to conclude that the ways in which communal labour systems operate today in Tanzania, for example<sup>95</sup>, necessarily shed light on the way they may have operated in Perthshire a century ago, we can certainly look to these studies as valid sources of comparative data regarding *general principles* of cooperation. While there are certainly some fundamental points of departure between the fabrics of these respective societies, removed from each other as they are in both time and space, there are also many basic consistencies in some of the underlying factors which serve to create a link between these cultures and communities. One such link can be seen in their common use of cooperative labour systems in order to fulfil certain basic needs.

One of the first scholars to write extensively in a comparative framework on the theme of communal labour was Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921)<sup>96</sup>. His book, *Mutual Aid*, first published in 1902, was an attempt to show the importance of cooperation within a society which was becoming increasingly preoccupied by

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<sup>94</sup> Several contemporaries of Redfield criticised this viewpoint as being fundamentally flawed. See, for example, Albert Eskeröd 1953-54: 53. Eskeröd challenges this idea: 'Naturally, this view is quite wrong and even rather dangerous, as the lower, or basic, strata of our own culture in Western Europe have been subject to the influences of the Western high cultures for so many hundreds of years. Therefore, and as a matter of necessity, the culture of these lower strata must have been patterned in another way than really primitive or exotic folk cultures'.

<sup>95</sup> One of the most detailed studies of the theme of cooperative labour organisation available relates to the Ndendeuli of Tanzania (Gulliver 1971).

<sup>96</sup> I am indebted to Ben Campbell of Manchester University for first drawing my attention to this work. Kropotkin led a remarkable life. The son of an influential Russian aristocratic general, his early travels in Siberia where he witnessed the hellish conditions of political prisoners, led him towards the revolutionary cause. No fan of Marxism, however, his world view was to become one centred around an anarchist philosophy. Lengthy spells in prison in both Russia and France provided him with plenty of time to think. It is perhaps in spite of his life long struggle against authority that he came to his conclusion that human society was centred upon mutual support (see Ridley 1996).

ideas of Darwinian competition. It was not the ideas of Darwin himself that Kropotkin wished to counter, but rather those of his disciples such as Thomas Henry Huxley, who developed his mentor's theories of natural selection to their extreme conclusions, and emphasised the principle of competition above all else<sup>97</sup>. To Kropotkin, human society has evolved into its present (successful) form, not through the principles of *mutual struggle*, but rather through the principles of *mutual aid*. His book is an attempt to convince the reader that this is equally true of both humans and other animals:

Happily enough, competition is not the rule either in the animal world or in mankind. It is limited among animals to exceptional periods, and natural selection finds better fields for its activity. Better conditions are created by the elimination of competition by means of mutual aid and mutual support. In the great struggle for life - for the greatest possible fullness and intensity of life with the least waste of energy - natural selection continually seeks out ways for avoiding competition as much as possible. (Kropotkin 1993 (1902):72)

The Kropotkin net was cast very widely in an attempt to provide convincing enough material to prove the dominance of cooperation over competition. Any number of societies - both human and animal - from a variety of continents and periods were drawn upon in his study<sup>98</sup>. Unlike many scholars since, Kropotkin was only too willing to admit that cooperative systems could continue to exist within industrialised societies with highly centralised political controls, and that they were not only a feature of peasant cultures. His thesis was quite simple: both human beings and other animals have a natural tendency to cooperate amongst their own species wherever and whenever they exist:

The mutual aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it

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<sup>97</sup> Huxley's Romanes Lecture of 1893 entitled *Evolution and Ethics*, for example, provides a clear summary of these views. This is reprinted in Huxley 1947.

<sup>98</sup> The chapter titles of *Mutual Aid* provide a neat indication of this range. They include *Mutual Aid Among Animals*; *Mutual Aid Among Savages*; *Mutual Aid Among Barbarians*; *Mutual Aid in the Medieval City* and *Mutual Aid Amongst Ourselves*. The two chapters dedicated to the latter cover such diverse themes as village life in Austria, Germany, France, Switzerland and Belgium as well as his native Russia while his British evidence is drawn from anything from mining disasters in the Rhondda to the Lifeboat Association.



has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history. (ibid.: 180)

Kropotkin may well have over-emphasised the importance of mutual aid in the same way that Huxley may have over-emphasised competition, but nonetheless, some scholars agree that his anarchist theories have stood the test of time relatively well, and he certainly provided a light for future scholars of human cooperation to follow.<sup>99</sup>

Several decades were to pass, however, before anyone actually did follow. Among the first was the anthropologist, Charles Erasmus, whose works in the 1950s provided the first thematic anthropological treatment of reciprocal labour. Based on his own research findings in South America,<sup>100</sup> but drawing extensively upon existing ethnographies from around the world, Erasmus identified two main forms of reciprocal labour: *exchange labour* and *festive labour*:

The distinctions made between exchange and festive labor generally concern the degree of obligation to reciprocate labor as well as the quantity and quality of the food and/or drink served the workers. (Erasmus 1956: 445)

In exchange labour arrangements, great emphasis is placed upon strict reciprocation of labour, with the *amount* of labour to be repaid being of greater importance than the *form* which that labour takes.<sup>101</sup> Obligations to reciprocate

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<sup>99</sup> Many current scholars believe that human society does not in reality reveal itself to be largely governed by either mutual aid or mutual struggle, but rather that the two principles co-exist side by side. For example, Julian Steward, a protagonist in the development of theories of cultural ecology remarks 'Competition of one sort or another may be present, but it is always culturally determined and as often as not cooperation rather than competition may be prescribed' (in Hammond (ed) 1964: 428). Geneticist Matt Ridley also draws much inspiration from Kropotkin's thesis: 'If life is a competitive struggle, why is there so much cooperation about? And why in particular are people such eager cooperators? Is humankind instinctively an anti-social or pro-social animal? That is my quest in this book. I shall demonstrate that Kropotkin was half right and that these roots go deeper than we think' (Ridley 1996: 5).

<sup>100</sup> Erasmus's main work was carried out in Haiti, but data was also collected 'opportunistically' from around seventy locations in Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile. (Erasmus 1956: 445).

<sup>101</sup> Erasmus explains this point thus: 'Ideally the labor reciprocated in an exchange agreement does not have to be for the same tasks. One man who helps another weed his field may, for

are very strong: if someone was unable to repay the labour, then he would be expected to provide another worker in his place. Getting the work done, then, is undoubtedly the prime concern of the exchange group. Food consumption is often modest, or at least little different in quantity or quality from normal meals:

According to prior arrangements, those exchanging work may feed one another in turn, take their own food with them to the fields, or return home for lunch. (ibid.: 445)

Festive labour, on the other hand, places much greater emphasis on the lavish provision and conspicuous consumption of food and drink. The host - the recipient of the labour - 'repays' the workers immediately in the form of these provisions. This obviates the need for reciprocation of labour to take place. While exceptions to this rule have certainly been noted, Erasmus concludes that

... festivities usually exempt the host from reciprocating the labour of at least some if not all of his guests. (ibid.: 446)

The immediacy of the repayment in festive labour arrangements make them a suitable means of procuring a workforce for tasks which arise infrequently, such as house building, while regular or at least seasonal tasks often lend themselves more to an exchange agreement. Erasmus also notes the importance of the social status and wealth of individual hosts in determining whether exchange or festive arrangements are preferred. Exchange labour, he asserts, works best among social equals, as the need among all participants is similar and therefore obligations to reciprocate are more likely to be met, and the system less likely to break down. This also ensures the continuance of high standards of work, as

participants know that the quantity and quality of effort expended on a neighbour's chores will be the measure of their return. (ibid.: 463)

The provision of lavish amounts of food and drink at festive gatherings, on the other hand, obviously requires a certain initial wealth on the part of the host, and

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example, request help in repairing his roof as repayment. The amount of time - usually a day for a day - rather than the job is the important consideration'. (Erasmus 1956: 447)

such gatherings may well attract poorer members of the community unaccustomed to such feasts:

Festive labor cuts across differences in wealth and status but predominantly in one direction, for work benefits generally go in the direction of higher status and festive rewards in the direction of lower status. (ibid.: 457)

Erasmus's principal achievement in this work was to begin the process of theoretical model-building which has created the base upon which subsequent scholars could build. The work of M P Moore, for example, is heavily influenced by Erasmus's 1956 paper: indeed Moore's categorisation model of cooperative labour is simply a more detailed development of that set out above. Nonetheless, Moore is an important figure in the growth of our understanding of the intricacies and patterns of communal labour systems, and so his work is worthy of consideration here.

Moore agrees with Erasmus's basic contention that all known systems of communal labour can be placed in either one of the exchange or festive labour categories, but suggests a further division within the exchange category to allow for what he sees as being two distinct methods of reciprocation - individual exchange and group exchange. These concepts are explained using the following scenarios:

#### *Individual Exchange Labour*

A and B may each work six days for C; C in return works six days for each of them, but A and B do not work for each other at all.

#### *Group Exchange Labour*

A, B and C work together as a team on the farm of each in turn.

Group exchange, therefore, is 'organisationally more demanding' than individual exchange labour (Moore 1975: 272).

Moore's descriptions of the defining characteristics of both exchange and festive labour are also very useful and as such are worth including here in full.

#### *Exchange labour*

... the number of households comprising the group is relatively small, not usually reaching double figures; members are all farm operators; the amount of work which the individual performs for others is reciprocated precisely; the host member (i.e. the member on whose land work is taking place) provides either no reward at all for his colleagues or, at the most, a standard everyday meal; cooperative work may embrace a variable proportion of all farm activities. (ibid.: 272)

#### *Festive labour*

... there is no permanent organisation, and work parties are organised ad hoc to undertake specific tasks; persons are attracted to a work party both by relatively lavish provision of food and drink, representing usually a level of consumption which exceeds, in desirability as well as quantity, that of the average day, and sometimes also by social ties of kinship or patron-clientage; holding a work party rarely implies any obligation on the part of the host to reciprocate by attending work parties called by persons who attended his own; if any reciprocity is implied it is only weak, and applies largely to close associates or kinsmen; the number of persons working together is usually larger, and sometimes very much larger, than in the case of exchange labour; because no permanent organisation exists, each work party requires considerable organisational activity and skills; the function of organiser may be delegated by the host to a specialist. (ibid.: 272-3)

Between them, Erasmus and Moore have created a basic model which will serve as the starting point for the analysis of the data collected within the present study.

## Europe

While both Erasmus and Moore could make reasonable claims to have based their conclusions on data from a wide sample of cultures, it has to be said that they drew upon very little material from the industrialised and 'developed' nations of Western Europe. Most of their data was derived from 'peasant' cultures from within the developing world, which had, after all, been the focal point for most ethnographies since anthropological fieldwork had begun. Moore defines peasants as members of

societies characterised by small-scale agricultural production organised in household units and dependent largely on biological sources of energy. (ibid.)

Such a definition, of course, would by no means have excluded many twentieth century Western European rural communities, but nonetheless, anthropologists have been slow to turn their attention towards their own doorsteps when looking for evidence on this theme.

A few exceptions do stand out, however. Both Ireland and Scandinavia<sup>102</sup> have been relatively well served in recent years by their folklorists and ethnologists in terms of the study of the cooperative labour phenomenon. In Ireland, the work of Anne O'Dowd is very important in this respect, and indeed in many ways was the initial inspiration for the present study (O'Dowd 1981). O'Dowd makes extensive use of data contained in responses to questionnaires which had previously been collected by both the Irish Folklore Commission and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.<sup>103</sup> Detailed analysis of the data contained within

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<sup>102</sup> The Norwegian *dugnad*, for example, has attracted a certain amount of attention in this respect (Klepp 1976 and Norddolum 1980). The *dugnad* is discussed in Chapter Six below. See also Abrahams 1984 and Ingold 1984 for comparative material from Finland. However, these studies do not seek to contribute to the model-construction process, and as such are not included in the present discussion.

<sup>103</sup> The first was circulated by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1940 and sought information on customs connected with the last sheaf at harvest time. The responses are contained in IFC MSS 758-765. The second questionnaire was circulated in 1941 and dealt with information about the blacksmith - IFC MSS 876-887. The third IFC questionnaire used by O'Dowd was from 1958 and dealt with social aspects of work - IFC MSS 1523, 1828, 1829 and 1669. Also



these questionnaire responses together with a variety of other documentary sources, leads O'Dowd to conclude that the categories of cooperative labour suggested by Erasmus and by Moore are not sufficient to reflect the situation in twentieth century Ireland. She puts forward an alternative four-category model:

1. Group labour.
2. Exchange labour.
3. Charity labour.
4. Voluntary labour.

Here, for the first time, we have a model based primarily on empirical research from a Western European culture, although certainly the influence of Moore and Erasmus is clear to see, and indeed overtly acknowledged. The main features of each of O'Dowd's categories are outlined in full below.

#### *Group Labour*

1. No permanent organisation. But it appears that membership of the group was generally confined to residents in a specified area, e.g. townland or parish.
2. There is no definite indication that workers were attracted by lavish provision of food and drink in all cases. The social aspect of coming together to work and meeting one's neighbours in such a way seems to have been the main attraction.
3. In most cases, the host did reciprocate. This did not constitute an obligation but was in the form of the observance of an unwritten law. A form of reciprocation also occurred whereby the farmer himself did not join the reciprocating work party but sent either sons or labourers in his place. In other instances, no form of reciprocation whatever was necessary.
4. Number of persons attending was generally larger than in exchange labour.

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consulted was a questionnaire circulated by the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in 1977 which concentrated specifically on cooperative labour. These responses are contained in MS UFTM/77/Q1. A useful analysis of the Ulster responses is also provided in Bell (1978).

5. Function of organiser was generally undertaken by the host, who may also have delegated this responsibility to a capable worker. This job included informing neighbours of the convention of the group, with a special invitation extended to individuals noted for particular skills.

Group labour had the dual and equally important functions of providing adequate hands for the labour and also a social outlet which included competition amongst the workers and games, dancing, food and drink when the day's work was complete.

### *Exchange Labour*

1. A permanent or a quasi-permanent organisation. Often the agreement was hereditary.
2. Either no food at all was provided or at most, a standard meal. In some instances, the workers would bring their own food when working on a neighbour's farm or go to their own houses for a meal. Food for horses, etc., was supplied by owners. Festivity was only associated with certain work.
3. The amount of work done appears to have been always reciprocated.
4. Number comprising the group was generally small. The most common arrangement was between two farmers. This would be increased by farmers who might have labourers working for them.
5. The main work to be done and the function of organiser was undertaken by the host.

The only function then of exchange labour agreements was that of organising and undertaking the work to be done more speedily and efficiently. These arrangements also included the mutual borrowing of agricultural implements, etc. amongst members.

### *Charity Labour*

1. No permanent organisation. Convention of the group was spontaneous and sudden. It generally involved neighbours helping a widow or a sick farmer on a Sunday morning.

2. Generally no food at all was provided or taken. Workers would return home and eat when the work was done.
3. There was no obligation on the part of the host to reciprocate.
4. Number comprising the group varied.
5. Generally no work at all was undertaken by the host.

Charity work groups can be seen as forming an important part of the mutual cooperative system. Their existence in a community safeguarded all against unforeseen calamities and misfortunes which might have occurred at any time.

#### *Voluntary Labour*

1. No permanent organisation. Voluntary work groups were convened for respected members of the community such as the blacksmith, herd, cow doctor, priest, carpenter, etc. As such, members of the work team included all who were indebted in some way and generally included all the community.
2. In most cases, there was lavish provision of food and drink.
3. There was no obligation on the part of the host to reciprocate by offering services for similar work.
4. Number of persons attending was large.
5. Function of organiser was undertaken by the host, or someone delegated by him.

Voluntary work groups correspond to what Erasmus ... calls 'festive' groups. It appears that the mere presence of the individuals on the day was more important than the actual work done.

(O'Dowd 1981: 68-70)

O'Dowd, then, adds the categories of charity labour and group labour to those previously identified by Erasmus, while her voluntary labour closely corresponds to the festive labour phenomenon as defined by Moore. O'Dowd's group labour and exchange labour categories are similar, and could arguably be seen as representing two sub-sets of the same phenomenon, but are apparently given separate status by O'Dowd largely on the grounds of scale and also degree of emphasis upon inclusion of accompanying festivities. In terms of scale, they are roughly analogous to Moore's group exchange and individual exchange sub-categories.

Perhaps the most important contribution made by O'Dowd's model, certainly as relates to the present study, is the introduction of the concept of *charity* labour. The distinction between work carried out under a reciprocal arrangement and that undertaken to help someone in need but *without* expectation of repayment, appears to be fundamental. Neither the model constructed by Erasmus, nor indeed Moore's adaptation, place any great emphasis on this distinction. However, this apparent omission on their part can largely be explained through consideration of the work of one other scholar, Marshall Sahlins, relating to the theme of reciprocity. Sahlins identifies three main forms of reciprocity: generalised reciprocity; balanced reciprocity and negative reciprocity. The distinguishing features of each are as follows:

#### *Generalised Reciprocity*

A extends help to B without thought of reciprocation of equal value (but with the understanding that the fact of having extended help gives the right to receive help on a later occasion).

#### *Balanced Reciprocity*

A extends help to B and receives reciprocation that is perceived as being of equal value.

### *Negative Reciprocity*

A exploits the principle of reciprocity in order to secure as much as possible from B by extending no or as little reciprocation as possible (preferably so that this course of action does not result in any negative sanction from B) (Klepp 1982, after Sahlins 1974).

Rather than organise these into three distinct categories, however, Sahlins suggests that they operate more in the form of points on a continuum. This thinking introduces a fresh angle on the present discussion in that it helps to validate the position of Moore and Erasmus in terms of their reluctance to identify charity labour as being worthy of recognition as a special case. Charity labour, as defined by O'Dowd, would clearly constitute an example of Sahlins' generalised reciprocity category, where there is an implied reciprocity at work: anyone giving help to another member of the community could reasonably expect help in return at any point in the future should it be required.

Nonetheless, my own view is that to hide the concept of charity labour within a reciprocity model of this kind serves to play down its importance. As is discussed in the next chapter, this phenomenon did play a vital role in social and economic cohesion within rural Perthshire, and so in the forthcoming ethnography and analysis, charity labour will be signposted as a valid and indeed vital category in its own right.

Several other direct relationships can be identified between Sahlins' reciprocity model and those discussed above. Balanced reciprocity identifies the nature of the relationships involved in exchange labour as defined by all the scholars mentioned in the present analysis, and indeed is certainly not in conflict with Moore's division of exchange agreements into the group and individual forms: both clearly adhere to the balanced form of reciprocity in Sahlins' terms.



Furthermore, the relationships suggested by negative reciprocity have been identified by Moore as having been a common feature of festive labour arrangements in some parts of the developing world:

There are reports from Africa of the relatively wealthy taking advantage both of new external markets for agricultural products and of the elements of moral obligation still attached to calls to attend festive work parties repeatedly, placing the poor on the slippery downward slope of attending the work parties, failing in consequence to cultivate their own land properly, and thus being forced to attend more work parties to meet current consumption requirements. (Moore 1975: 275)

Festive labour, then, does have the potential to show symptoms of negative reciprocity, although exploitation is by no means necessarily a central feature of this form of communal labour arrangement.

### *Urban Parallels*

All of the works discussed thus far have represented analyses based largely upon empirical evidence gathered from within rural societies. Urban societies have featured little in attempts to understand the principles involved within the phenomenon of neighbour cooperation, although the second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a few tentative scholarly steps in this direction. It is interesting that this body of work has developed quite independently of the anthropological investigations highlighted above. Most of the urban studies have emerged from the discipline of sociology, and tend to utilise survey methodologies rather than the participant observation techniques favoured by the anthropologists. The works of Erasmus and Moore, for instance, are rarely cited by the urban sociologists investigating this theme, suggesting that they were either unimpressed by their work or they were unaware of its existence. Nonetheless, the ideas which emerge from these scholars are by no means inconsistent with the findings discussed above.

One body of urban work which deserves attention in this context is that of Philip Abrams and his colleagues at Durham University. While the bulk of this work, carried out in the late 1970s and early 1980s, sets out to examine the potential benefits of neighbourhood care schemes, preparatory work involved examining informal principles of neighbouring within a number of streets in a variety of English towns. The initial aim was to focus upon the social contexts of neighbouring in order to determine the circumstances in which more sustained and substantial types of neighbourly help were provided (Bulmer 1986; Robinson and Abrams 1971). From this, Abrams identified four distinct bases of 'active informal helping':

*Altruism*: the acceptance of a norm of beneficence as an absolute guideline for personal life.

*Tradition*: a practice of taken-for-granted helpfulness strongly implanted in childhood or earlier experience in adult life and carried over as an unconsidered principle of present activity.

*Status*: the culling of self-esteem from the patronage aspect of the relationship between donor and beneficiary or from the honorific connotations of being seen as a caring agent by the local society.

*Reciprocity*: no definition given but this was identified as being the most widespread and influential of these bases for care (Bulmer 1986: 10).

Rather than concentrate on the division of neighbour help activities into identifiable categories, Abrams and his team are more concerned with attempting to explain why it exists at all, and why it manifests itself in certain ways. Abrams insists that neighbouring (which he defines as 'a socially defined relationship ranging from highly formalised and institutionalised rules and obligations to

highly variable voluntary exchanges') should not be viewed as being axiomatic or 'natural', but rather must be *explained*.

These points are included here as they have influenced the forthcoming analysis of communal labour systems within rural Perthshire. In the light of scholarship's widespread rejection of the existence of an urban-rural dichotomy, there is no convincing reason to ignore the findings of urban investigations within the present study. Indeed, this is a point which Abrams himself recognises, despite his reluctance to draw upon rural parallel studies himself:

Urbanism and ruralism loosely indicate variations on the division of labour; they do not affect patterns of neighbouring by virtue of their intrinsic characteristics as settings but only insofar as they point to variations in the life chances of their inhabitants, variations, that is, in the possibilities, opportunities and costs of both local and extra-local social interaction. (Bulmer 1986: 38)

Finally, one other concept which has emerged from the discipline of sociology will be drawn upon in the forthcoming analysis of the Perthshire material. Peter Mann has argued that the idea of neighbouring is best understood if we recognise the existence of two forms of neighbourliness, *manifest* and *latent*. Manifest neighbourliness, he argues, is characterised by overt forms of social relationships, such as mutual visiting in the home and going out for purposes of pleasure, while the latent form involves the existence of favourable attitudes towards neighbours which result in positive action *when the need arises*, particularly in times of crisis or emergency (Mann 1954: 164). A continuum can thus be constructed with positive and negative poles. Where both manifest and latent patterns are very negative there is a lack of social relationships between neighbours, and even in a crisis, neighbours would not rely on each other for help. At the other end of the continuum there is a great deal of intercourse between neighbours on a regular basis, and in times of particular need. In such cases, both latent and manifest neighbourliness are very positive. The continuum allows for varying combinations of both forms to be represented.

### *A Working Model*

While the sociological (and largely urban) and anthropological (and largely rural) contributions to this body of theory have emerged with little apparent cross-fertilisation of ideas between them, it is clear that they do share a good deal of common ground, and that their conclusions are by no means mutually exclusive or incompatible. The scholars mentioned above have all made important contributions to our current understanding of the intricacies and patterns involved in the communal labour phenomenon, as indeed have the researchers upon whose ethnographic reports their analyses are based.

In light of the above analysis, the ethnographic material collected from rural Perthshire during fieldwork will now be presented under two general headings, for the purposes of logistics and ease of reference. The next chapter will examine the concept of **exchange labour** while the following chapter will deal with the category of **charity labour**. These have been selected as being the most useful working categories for the presentation of the evidence. Finally, a detailed analysis of this material will be presented which will examine the implications of the Perthshire evidence within the wider international context in relation to the theories and models discussed above.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXCHANGE LABOUR

Research for this thesis has uncovered a variety of situations in which individual farm units within Perthshire would enter into exchange labour agreements with their neighbours in order to perform certain agriculturally-related tasks without the need for cash transactions to take place. Most of this evidence is of a qualitative character and has been gathered through the medium of oral testimony during fieldwork. The following ethnography is largely based upon detailed analysis of these data, as extensive searches of various categories of documentary sources have brought little information to light on this theme.

**The term ‘exchange labour’ refers here to non-paid reciprocal work practices involving members of separate agricultural units.**

A variety of tasks were carried out using exchange labour within different parts of Perthshire during the period of study. Some tasks were more conducive to the use of these arrangements than others, and there appears to be a loose relationship between the size and orientation of agricultural units and the type and number of tasks involved. As we shall see, the larger, more commercialised units which were generally to be found in the *carse* areas of the county tended to rely less heavily on mutual exchange labour than smaller, family-run farms, where a wider variety of work situations might utilise non-paid labour as part of an exchange agreement. There was also a marked variation in the degree of formality surrounding these exchange arrangements. In this case, this was determined more by the nature and scale of the tasks involved than by the location or size of the holding. Relatively highly structured exchange group arrangements were deployed for tasks involving the gathering of sheep, for



instance, such as clippings and dippings, while less labour-intensive tasks tended to give rise to less formalised exchanges.

### **Grain Threshing**

Oral testimony has shown that one of the most common situations in which exchange labour arrangements would be brought into practice in Perthshire during the twentieth century was when an agricultural unit hired in a travelling threshing mill in order to thresh a large amount of grain at one time. These machines, steam-driven for the most part and tractor-driven by the end of our period, were a common sight travelling along the lanes of Lowland Perthshire in particular, although they were by no means unfamiliar north and west of the Highland line too. Such mobile mills had been in existence in Britain since the mid nineteenth century, having developed from static farm-based steam mills which had begun to appear by the end of the Napoleonic Wars. These, in turn, were an advanced variation of stationary horse- and water-powered mills which were an innovation rapidly gaining popularity on some arable farms in the final decade of the eighteenth century (Collins 1972: 17). Perthshire, represented in particular by the Carse of Gowrie, had been at the forefront of the adoption of this new technology which could, as Collins demonstrates, make great savings in time, effort and therefore money, when compared to the use of the traditional flail (*ibid.*: 21-25). In 1793/94, the Carse of Gowrie was home to 61 stationary horse- and water-powered threshing machines, proof of rapid acceptance when compared to available figures from other intensive arable production areas within Britain: even by 1809 there were 'very few' such machines in Surrey, only 3 in Sussex the previous year and none at all in Northamptonshire (*ibid.*: 16-17).

The first mobile mill was developed in East Anglia around 1800, but significant production began from the fifth decade of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*: 26). By the 1860s, the services of travelling mills were being regularly advertised in the local press in Perthshire. One such announcement read

The Portable Steam Thrashing Machine, by Roley and Co, well known in the Coupar Angus district of Strathmore, is now under the superintendence of Robert Watt, Engineer, Coupar Angus. Orders sent to him, or Mr Patterson, saddler, will receive prompt attention (*Perthshire Courier*, Sept 6th 1860).

In his discussion of the development of threshing techniques within Scotland, Fenton asserts

The annual or twice-yearly coming of the steam-mill, and later on of the tractor-driven mill, was one of the main occasions in the farming year when neighbours had an opportunity of coming together in communal activity. (1976: 89)

However, no study to date has undertaken the task of analysing in detail the nature and organisation of this communal activity in relation to Scotland, and so this is the aim of the following section within the specific context of rural Perthshire.

The reasons behind the use of exchange labour between neighbouring farms when travelling mills were hired were largely logistical. The mills would be hired in once or twice a year as this allowed a large amount of a grain crop to be threshed in an intensive burst. Some farms hired in mills because they had no permanent threshing facilities of their own, while many farmers who did own mills were still glad of the opportunity to thresh larger volumes than their smaller home-based equipment would allow:

WW: The only time they'd help each other wis when the travellin thrashin mill cam in aboot.

GW: So that would be once a year then?

WW: Oh no, different times o the year. Sometimes you know you'd maybe hae a thrash at the back end and then usually Spring - a thrash for the seed corn for the incomin year, ye see? An then always roond aboot May month, if it wisnae a done by that time there wis a big thrash at May month. Before the 28th of May - either wheat or corn<sup>104</sup>, it didnae matter. (Will West SA 1988.19)

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<sup>104</sup> The term 'corn', within Perthshire, invariably refers to oats.

These mobile mills would arrive on a farm accompanied normally by two operators who usually slept in mobile caravans, although their meals were often supplied by the farmer on whose farm they were working (or at least by his wife or a domestic servant). The threshing process itself was very labour intensive, and required a workforce of around fourteen people in order to run effectively. Very few Perthshire farms could muster such a large force from within their own ranks, and so extra labour had to be procured from elsewhere. Rather than hire in waged hands, it made much greater economic sense to exchange labour with other units in the area who had the exact same requirements and were likely to be hiring the mill at around the same time. It was this shared need which made the system viable, a point noted by many anthropologists in relation to such arrangements found throughout the world, and discussed in the critique of Erasmus's work above. However, because of the fact that other daily tasks on the farm could not be left aside, farmers were reluctant to send all of their labour to a neighbouring farm to help out at the mill. Thus typically four or five farms tended to pool their resources for this purpose, creating an informal but essential cooperative unit which could be relied upon when the need arose:

DW: Aye, that was an understanding. Everybody understood that. You needit anything - for a thrashin mill coming in, you needit anything from fourteen to sixteen men to keep everything going like clockwork. So it was understood, they'd just let you know two days before the mill, "we're getting the mill in on Wednesday I'll maybe need three men".

GW: And that was just done on a swap basis, there was no money involved?

DW: No, no. There was no money involved at all.

GW: And how was it organised? As you say it was just two days before hand but would each farm have a certain date each year usually?

DW: No, no just when ever it suited. If they were requiring straw or something for feedin.

GW: So they wouldn't wait until there were a few farms in the area all needed it ....?

DW: No, no if they were desperate for it. Generally when they did come there was always maybe two, three would take it, but just if they weren't needing it they wouldnae. (Dave West, SA 1988.21)

Ye'd maybe get - if there wis maybe, say four farms involved outside the one ye was at - ye'd maybe get one man or maybe two men off each place to make up about fourteen men. (Will West, SA 1988.19).

A detailed description of the whole process was given in an interview by Will West, who was present at many such gatherings, and whose memories of them were very vivid indeed:

### **CD Track 9**

One o the millmen stood in the hole in the mill; one louser stood there and the other stood there, and the men forked off the stacks onto these boards. And they had a knife - the women had a knife in their hand, and they liftit the sheaf, cut the string and handit to the millmen and he stood there and riddled it into the trough. All the one way - no time about - but heads all the one way. And then they just kept goin. They'd draw the mill in atween two rows o stacks you see. Which would maybe be about fourteen, sixteen feet wide, tae let the mill in, cause when the mill was travellin forward they let the boards doon, you see Gary, then they [ ? ] And each board was close to the stack - two stacks, one man on each stack, forkin to each o his lousers - that side and then that side. The result would be that maybe that two stacks would maybe be done before ten o'clock. And the other two would maybe be done - depends on the size o them - by denner time. That'd maybe be eight to ten stacks in the day. Depends what size they were. And you've maybe - depends where the grain was goin - it was usually weighed up into hunderweight -and-a-half bags. And maybe be ... two or three men on there weighin them up and carryin them on yer back, usually up to a bloody granary up the stair so's it was easier loaded onto lorries or carts. It was mostly carts tae the station at that time. You'd hae somebody, the two men on the stacks, maybe another one heavin ower the sheaves, and then there'd be a man buildin the straw - the straw stack, and there'd be folk trailin the bunches fae the back o the mill tae the stack for the man tae fork them onto the stack. And then a casual worker or a women at the chaff that cam oot the end o the mill, carryin it away in a caff sheet or rakin it back into a heap. ... And the other millman just went roond about to see everything was goin aright you know. And then he would go up and have a shot o the feedin for maybe half and hour or an hour if he was the foreman on the mill. (SA 1988.19)

Will's memory of these occasions is obviously very clear indeed, as he is able to recollect every detail without the slightest hesitation. It is obvious from his account that the threshing process required great teamwork and organised



cooperation if the operation was to run successfully. The mill operators were very much in charge of the proceedings, an important point given that the workers were drawn from separate farm units and that the normal hierarchical chain of command could not therefore apply.

Both men and women worked together on these occasions, with two women normally being given the task of cutting the strings on the sheaves before handing them to the operator, and women were also often represented in some of the other roles described. However, their principal duties on such occasions were of a domestic nature, especially the provision of food for the workforce:

It was a busy day for my mother and my sisters - they did all the catering which consisted of meals around the table. (Norman West, SA 1988.18)

Food was provided for all the workers at 'mid yokin', dinner and tea, and at one time it was also customary on some farms for the farmer to come around with a bottle of whisky at one o'clock, and everyone present was entitled to a dram.

On many of the larger Lowland Perthshire farms, the employees were given a pendicle for themselves and their families to work for their own subsistence and profit, and so they would also tend to make use of the mill when it was in the area. In Airntully, on the banks of the River Tay north of Perth, where my paternal grandfather worked as grieve, there were six pendicles, each one with two or three stacks of corn to be threshed, and it normally took a day or a day and a half to complete the work for all six. In this case, certain informal arrangements were agreed among the pendiclars. Whosoever threshing was being carried out in the morning, for instance, was obliged to supply the whisky for that dinner time. In order to ensure fairness, though, the order in which the pendicles were worked was rotated each year:

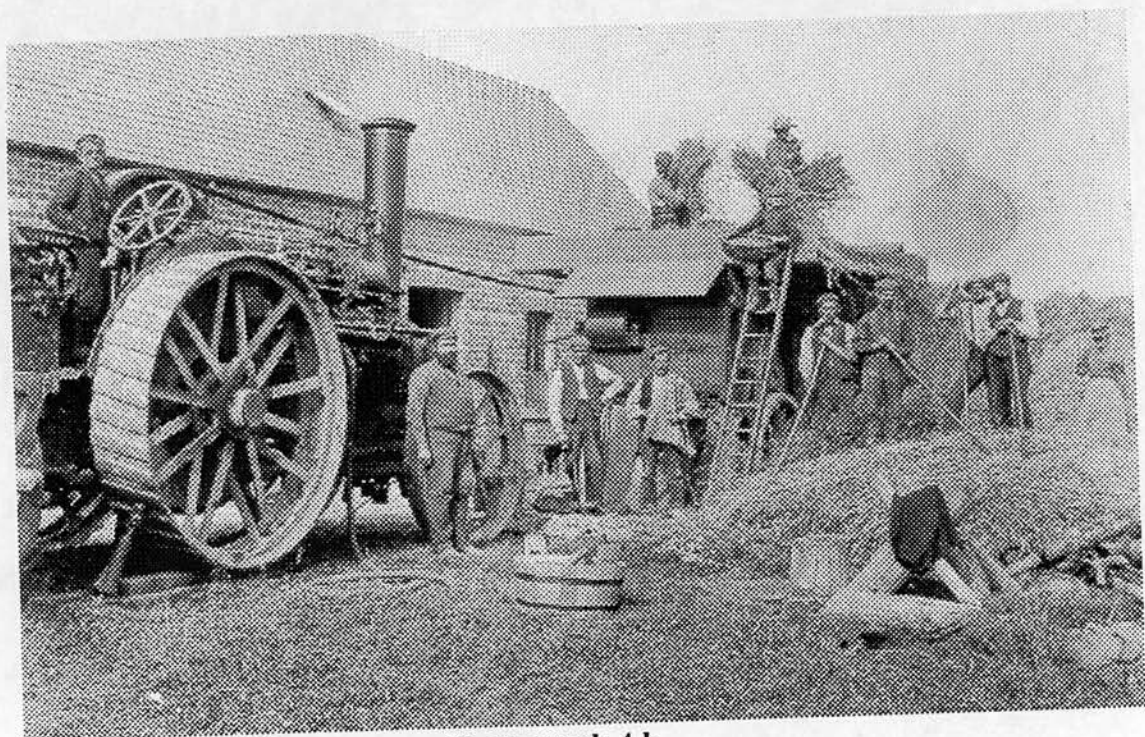
But it was time aboot - it wasnie the same every year, it was just time aboot, it worked. (SA 1988.19)





**Photograph 4.a**

*Travelling Thrashing Mill, North Barns, Bankfoot  
Scottish Life Archive, National Museums of Scotland c10858*



**Photograph 4.b**

*Travelling Threshing Machine, Unknown Location, Perthshire  
Scottish Life Archive, National Museums of Scotland c2869*

While Will West's mind seems to have focused in particularly closely on the technical aspects of the threshing procedure and the organisation of the workforce, others appear to dwell more on the fact that this arrangement brought people together, and so emphasise the social importance of these gatherings. The following extended extract is taken from an interview with John Menzies, Lettar of Balleid, Blairgowrie. The period under discussion is the late 1950s and the early 1960s:

#### **CD Track 10**

GW: What sort of thrashin machines would there be then?

JM: Well that was wi the travellin mills that came in. But that was a different - see at that time it was a different sort o a life, you know. I think we've lost a lot o that. You know, there was far mair pride in your work. You know at night you would walk the district to see somebody else's stacks. You know, when it came to thrashin, the thrashin mill came in and you see well we would have - I think it was five other farms, and we all worked together. When you had the mill everybody came to you, and there was never any money changed hands, nothing like that. I don't even, well there's a big farm down there, lower down than us, now they were a big farm; they employed far more staff than we had here. But they still sent their staff up just the same, and when they were thrashin we sent our staff down. It didnae matter if they were sendin four men up and we were only sendin two back - that was never - there was never anything like that taken into account. If he had four days at the thrashin mill and we only had three, you know, it balanced itself out. But money never entered it at all. These were good days in that.. well, I was younger, right enough, as well, but you went to the mills and there was great rivalry and plenty fun at the thrashin mill days, you know. Hard work, a lot o it right enough, when you think about it now, but you never thought that at the time. We never knew anything else, that was the way it was done.

GW: So they'd be steam thrashin mills, were they?

JM: No, I don't remember the steam. It was all tractor driven ones by that time.

GW: This is the fifties?

JM: Yes. You see I was only - fae the time I started workin up until 1962, the thrashin mills were finished by then. I only had a short period at them. Then the combines came in by then.

GW: So these thrashin mills, would they be like - someone would own one, and that would be what they would do, travel around the whole time..?

JM: There was a chap from Burrelton that we got. Harry Smith - he had a mill. And it seemed to be - maybe in the area there was two, in about

an area from here, Blairgowrie, right round Burrelton and that - two tractors in that area wi mills. You got in either the one or the other. You see you maybe only had four, five days at it. And that was your crop thrashed. I often wonder now how they managed in those days to be able to keep their grain on the farm from October say, to February, March afore they thrashed it. We couldnie afford to do that now. We've got to get it down the road as quick as we can to get the money back in. That's one of the biggest changes. At that time they didnae seem to - well folk werenae committed to banks the same as they are now. But we had a lot o fun in those days, which is not there now. You never see that now. ...Wi this big place down here, it was an old man that was the grieve there, and things were still done there in the fifties and early sixties, as they were thirty years ago. If you were on the grain there, they had to take the grain to a loft, about a hundred yards to the stairs o the loft. And ye'd twenty seven stairs you'd to carry this hunderweight and a half bag up the stairs, and tip it out. And then go back doon and yer next bag was full at the bottom and there was maybe three or four o ye on the grain doin that. Of course when you were away the boy put a fifty sixer at the bottom o yer bag. That was the sort o things which went on in those days. They were good days in those days.

GW: So the likes of when the threshin mills were comin round, and if a neighbouring farmer was sending staff to you ... would they just take a piece with them...?

JM: No. Each farm - .... the farmer's wife provided the meals. You got a piece in the mornin, your dinner, and then a piece in the afternoon. And then there was a lot of rivalry as well, you know. How good a meal you got here - you knew where all the best meals were, by the time you were goin roond. And then that was - of course in those days it was a more friendly sort o neighbourhood anyway. There was more people in the neighbourhood at that time as well. Now you never - very seldom you see yer neighbours the same as ye did in those times.

GW: With these tractor driven threshin mills - I know from speakin to other people who remember the steam ones, it was quite labour intensive. You'd maybe need fourteen or fifteen people to do the operation. Was it still the same with the tractor driven ones?

JM: The actual thrashin mill was still the same whether it was steam or whether it was the tractor. A lot of skill was involved .. at that time, that nobody could do now. Because they've all gone by the wayside. Buildin stacks and buildin strae soos and - that's gone now. (SA 1998.23)

The above conversation highlights a number of interesting points in relation to the communal labour arrangements associated with the hiring of travelling threshing mills. The first point to note is that the informant seems to have viewed



the coming of the threshing mill and the associated communal work as being something very positive - the extract is regularly punctuated with remarks which strongly suggest that he laments the passing of this particular tradition:

‘I think we’ve lost a lot of that’

‘These were good days..’

‘...there was great rivalry and plenty fun...’

‘But we had a lot o fun in those days, which is not there now.’

‘They were good days in those days’

‘... of course in those days it was a more friendly sort o neighbourhood anyway’.

Of course, one of the dangers of taking oral history testimony too literally is that informants may have a tendency to remember the positive aspects of times gone by while blocking out the negative. This is a problem with which oral historians have been wrestling for many years now, and there is no doubt that it is important that we remain aware of such possibilities. However, clues as to the extent to which individuals may be prone to this can be obtained through close analysis of the transcript text. In this case, the informant himself seems aware of the possibility of such a tendency, and briefly checks himself:

These were good days in that ... **well, I was younger, right enough, as well**, but you went to the mills and there was great rivalry and plenty fun at the thrashin mills, you know. (my emphasis)

He seems to realise that he is possibly not taking the enthusiasm of youth into account, but after a moment’s reflection, rejects this and reiterates the very positive memories which these gatherings hold for him.

But what was it about these gatherings that makes their memory so positive for this informant? Implicit in some of these remarks is the suggestion that they were linked to, or indeed indicative of, an entire way of farming life which was somehow *better* and more enjoyable than that of today. All of the short

statements outlined above show either explicitly or implicitly that he compares 'those days' favourably to 'now'. These appear to be closely linked to the idea of communality or working together: this was what brought the 'fun' and also the 'rivalry' (which is portrayed in a very positive sense here, and indeed by this informant elsewhere in the interview). 'Rivalry' is linked here to 'skill' and 'pride in your work', but the context is clearly that this was measured in relation to the wider community:

You know, there was far mair pride in your work. You know at night you would walk the district to see somebody else's stacks.

This tends to suggest that to this individual at least, the local farming community, as opposed to the individual farm unit, was perceived as being the main arena within which workers were judged and with which they identified themselves. The arrival of the threshing mill and the workers from neighbouring farms was therefore one opportunity for such rivalries to be given an outlet; but these manifested themselves as 'fun', as in the example of the trickery described above where a heavy weight would be placed at the bottom of a grain sack which had to be carried up the ladders to the grain loft.

Indeed, this rivalry or spirit of competition extended to the support network attached to these gatherings in the form of food provision, again emphasising the fact that people's behaviour and aspirations were closely bound up with their attitudes towards the community at large, or indeed with their own perceptions of the community's attitudes towards them:

...the farmer's wife provided the meals. You got a piece in the mornin, your dinner, and then a piece in the afternoon. And then there was a lot of rivalry as well, you know. How good a meal you got here - you knew where all the best meals were, by the time you were goin round.

These comments are very significant, for the existence of this exchange labour system provided the opportunity for people who would not normally eat together to do so on such occasions. It could be claimed, on one hand, that the desire to



compete with, and by implication, to beat, one's peers is a basic human tendency and so to discover such rivalries in operation in rural Perthshire is hardly surprising.<sup>105</sup> This may indeed be true, but the important point here is surely the fact that these rivalries require a vehicle in order to allow them to become manifest. The fact that these exchange arrangements have now largely disappeared has denied the community one such vehicle, and may well be one of the root factors in JM's mourning of the passing of 'thae days'.

This rivalry tendency should of course be seen in context, however. The basic principle underpinning the existence of this form of exchange labour was mutual *aid*, not mutual *struggle* or competition. Rivalries could certainly operate to improve performances, and indeed this is a phenomenon which was extremely common amongst the farm labouring population of Perthshire and far beyond, as is discussed elsewhere in this thesis. In this case, the standard of food provision at these gatherings was presumably kept high because of the judgmental attitudes of those attending and the resultant effect upon the reputations of the providers. However, it was not only the channels of rivalry which disappeared with the passing of this tradition, for neighbours were also denied an important opportunity simply to *be* together - a situation again obviously viewed unfavourably by John Menzies:

Now you never - very seldom - you see yer neighbours the same as ye did in those times.

This contact through work appears to have been cherished by John, not only because of the fun it brought through rivalry, but because of the feeling of common purpose which was engendered as a result of the communal labour process. The egalitarian nature of the concept, for instance, is obviously strong in his mind:

... well there's a big farm down there, lower down than us, now they were a big farm; they employed far more staff than we had here. But

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<sup>105</sup> This of course is returning to the Huxley / Kropotkin debate as outlined above.

they still sent their staff up just the same, and when they were thrashin we sent our staff down. It didnae matter if they were sendin four men up and we were only sendin two back - that was never - there was never anything like that taken into account. If he had four days at the thrashin mill and we only had three, you know, it balanced itself out.

JM seems impressed by the fact that neighbours were prepared to cooperate even if they operated on different scales in terms of production and size of labour force. Furthermore, his comments demonstrate a basic awareness of the economic principles behind this form of exchange labour, in terms of the theme of reciprocity. It is unfortunate and not a little frustrating to be investigating this phenomenon after it has ceased to exist, as this obviously prevents the type of participant/observation approach which has been utilised by those anthropologists who have studied these issues within the developing world where exchange labour continues to operate. Thus, a detailed quantitative measurement of the economic principles behind these arrangements is impossible in relation to Perthshire.

Based on JM's remarks outlined above, however, it *is* possible to attempt to address this question through calculations of labour hours *likely to have been spent* by each unit involved.

Considering the relationship between JM's unit and the larger farm he mentions, and using the figures he suggests relating to numbers of people provided and days worked, a simple calculation shows that the reciprocity involved was not in fact balanced, but actually favoured the smaller unit.

If JM's farm = unit A and the larger farm = unit B, then Unit A provides 2 men for unit B for 4 days, amounting to 8 labour days in total. Unit B provides unit A with 4 men but only for 3 days, amounting to a total of 12 labour days. Unit B will have spent a total of 28 labour days threshing grain ( $4 \times 3 + 4 \times 4$ ) as against unit A's total of only 14 labour days ( $2 \times 3 + 2 \times 4$ ). If unit A had half the volume of unit B's threshing to be carried out, then it could be argued that this was an example of Sahlins' balanced reciprocity category; the quantities involved,

however, are not known in this case. However, if the real measurement of reciprocity is in terms of hours spent working on the other unit, then in this case A obviously came out of the deal with an advantage over B of 4 labour days.

Certainly, these calculations can provide us with only the most basic of guides, as they are of course based on passing comments which include figures obviously given by JM as mere illustrative examples. If, for instance, he had sent three men to unit B rather than two, then a balanced reciprocity would indeed have been in operation as each unit would have lent a total of 12 labour days to the other.

While a lack of convincing data on this theme obviously minimises the value of any conclusions based on such calculations, what is of interest is the fact that JM's perception of the situation was that 'it balanced itself out'. Whether he meant this quite as literally as this quantitative approach would demand is unclear, but his comment that such details were never taken into account perhaps suggests that in his experience exact reciprocity was not an important factor in the equation. He considered the arrangement to be fair and the concept behind it to be sound, and so these factors were further positive markers for him in his recollection of these events.

Another notable feature of this form of exchange labour was that no money changed hands. This information was *volunteered* by this informant (as opposed to being offered in response to a specific question) and indeed he seems to identify this as being both important and again a very positive feature of these arrangements:

When you had the mill everybody came to you, and there was never any money changed hands, nothing like that.

But money never entered it at all.

At a later stage in the interview, JM is discussing the fact that in general, neighbours are much less prepared to help one another out nowadays, and this he again links to the greater reliance on 'money':

JM: If the boy was needin help, you went and gave him help, it didnae matter what it was. But now, you see, it's difficult. You wouldnie go and offer: if he asked, fair enough. That has gone in the thing as well. But I think that's only the way the whole thing's gone - financially, and - money's the biggest involvement in the whole thing.

GW: So everything's geared towards, keeping the banks happy?

JM: That's about it. Yea. And that has done away with a lot of the comradeship and what not in the area I think. Everybody's that committed now.

Here John overtly claims a direct relationship exists between the increased emphasis on money and the loss of 'comradeship' which he perceives to have occurred within his local community. There is a strong link being made here between communality, fun and absence of cash on one hand, and individuality, lack of fun and reliance upon cash on the other. Indeed, this is a connection which was made by a number of informants in relation to all forms of exchange (and charity) labour:<sup>106</sup>

There wis more neighbourliness in these days than what there is now. Folk weren't livin just for money entirely. It was more community spirit ye know...which you don't get nowadays. Money's done all that out (John Fisher SA 1988.20).

Within the context of the evidence set out above, then, the following conclusion can be formed:

absence of cash + communal labour + rivalry = positive sentiment

use of cash + individualism = negative sentiment

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<sup>106</sup> The distinctions made in this study between exchange and charity forms of communal labour were not necessarily recognised or emphasised by the informants themselves, although they would certainly be aware of the social rules governing different arrangements, and would therefore know when reciprocity would be expected. The actual terms *exchange* and *charity* would not generally have been used, however.

Thus we see that in the case of John Menzies at least, the reasons behind his very positive attitude towards his early years in farming are clearly expressed within his comments, and they are certainly linked in this case to the existence of communal labour arrangements. There *are* explanations encoded in his testimony which serve to back up his enthusiasm for ‘the old days’, and he is thus sheltered from accusations of blind sentimentality. His evidence is valid as it is intrinsically consistent and appears, through detailed analysis, to be representative of his perceptions of his past. This is a point which requires emphasis, as this examination is ethnological rather than purely historical: communal labour must be viewed as having been an important aspect of local life in JM’s view *because he signposts it as such* in his testimony.

John Menzies was by no means alone, however, in his fondness for working in a communal system when the travelling mill came to the area. Positive sentiment was displayed by a number of people when talking of their experiences at the mill, and indeed within most communal labour situations. The provision of food and drink seems to be central to this attitude, for food provision by the host was a common factor in all such gatherings. Although this was not the prime motivation for employees to attend, it certainly often seems to be signalled up as a part of the proceedings which has remained firmly at the forefront of their recollections. The following comment was fairly typical:

Aye if the mill was goin to a neeberin farm and you would maybe be the one who’d be sent along, usually the bothy lads that got the privilege of goin to the mill, because they got a their grub. You see what I mean?  
(Will West, SA 1988.19)

As was shown in the ethnography of bothy life outlined in Chapter Three above, the provision of meals was not normally high on the list of favourite chores within the bothy, and an extremely monotonous diet emerged as a result. Whenever the chance of a meal presented itself elsewhere it seems to have been greatly welcomed by the bothy lads, both because it was prepared by someone



else and because it may have consisted of something other than oatmeal! The appearance of the odd dram or two was an extra bonus:

WW: Well, when I started off at first, Gary, they used to come oot at ten o'clock wi the bottle o whisky. Every man got a nip a piece. That died a natural death of course - it was a stopped. But when I started doin it you used to get it - up to maybe a couple o year after, it just dies a natural death.

GW: Why was that, d'you know?

WW: I don't know, ken what the reason was.

GW: That was the farmer supplied the whisky - whoever was ...

WW: Aye whoever was - the farmer or whoever. At the village o Airtully up there, there'd be - one, two, three, four, five, six - pendicles, and they a had a couple or three stacks o corn, you see? And it was just a hale day or maybe a day and a half includin us as well. But whoever was there in the mornin had to dish out this bottle o whisky, you know, a nip o whisky. Then it would be somebody else the followin year if you know what I mean, but it just died oot a natural death. (SA 1988.19)

Thus, while exact reciprocity of labour was not deemed to be of great importance, care does seem to have been taken to ensure that a fair balance was achieved in terms of some of the smaller details, such as the provision of the whisky. More importantly, perhaps, these facts were *remembered* by the informants, and volunteered in a manner that strongly suggests that this equality was seen to be important. It applied to the provision of food too:

And then you got your tea at ten o'clock - maybe they'd be finished by about eleven, move tae the other place, thrash it and they would hae tae supply the dinner. But it was time about - it wasnie the same every year, it was just time about, it worked. (SA 1988.19)

The free supply of food and drink was not the central focus or principal attraction of these gatherings in the way that it was in the case of the festive labour phenomenon as outlined by Erasmus and by Moore, for neighbouring farm units pooled their resources for purely practical purposes when this form of thrashing took place. However, oral testimony reveals that it was certainly important in the minds and memories of those taking part. As we shall see, this is

a feature which is common to all forms of communal labour gathering in Perthshire.

As was pointed out above, the main reason why neighbouring units swapped their labour to operate the travelling threshing mill was simply that very few farms could muster the fourteen or sixteen individuals required, and this arrangement obviated the need for hired labour to be brought in. However, in comparison to some other agricultural tasks which utilised reciprocal labour arrangements such as sheep clipping, many of the jobs at the mill did not require well-developed skills and did not therefore need to be carried out by specialists. It is for this reason that farm units which formed part of an estate which also focused on non-agricultural activities such as forestry and game, could make use of existing employees for some of the more laborious farming tasks of the season. While this seldom completely removed the need for reciprocal arrangements to be made with neighbouring farms, it did reduce the number of such links which were required. John Fisher's explanation serves as a useful illustration of this point in relation to a small sporting and farming estate in the Highland area:

GW: Was there much help - between estates - was there much - between farms - was there much coming and going?

JF: Oh, well the laird who owned the estate you see. And there was a factor also. And if you were pushed - say you had the big thrashin mill comin in - it used to be a steam - a tractor engine that drove the mill - and then they got tractors in after that. But these mills you see - they'd no mills on the farms - and these mills would come in for two days maybe to a farm. And you mobilised all the labour you could get, and got in touch with the factor and he would lend you maybe three or four foresters tae help ye out, you see. (SA 1988.20)

Nonetheless, there were still plenty of tasks carried out in that area of Breadalbane which did involve the use of reciprocal labour arrangements between neighbours, as is outlined below.

## **Sheep Farming**

Exchange labour arrangements were also heavily relied upon by shepherds and sheep farmers within Perthshire for tasks such as the gathering, clipping and dipping of sheep. Sheep farming was of particular importance to the Highland areas of Perthshire where the terrain was not well suited to other forms of intensive production. While sheep were by no means completely absent from the Lowland agricultural infrastructure, they were not present in heavy enough concentrations to require the use of neighbour help. For this reason, most of this section will concentrate on the Highland area.

As was the case with grain threshing, the principal reasons behind the use of exchange labour within sheep farming were logistical and economic. Tasks such as clipping and, to a slightly lesser extent, dipping, were very labour intensive within their own right, but were made even more so by the need to gather the sheep in from the hill before these operations could begin at all. Clipping in particular was a task which also involved a high degree of training and skill, and so the employing of casual hands was not a realistic option if extra labour was required. Furthermore, these tasks had to be performed at certain times of the year to protect the health of the animals irrespective of the state of the wool market at the time - as one informant remarked, 'it has to come off' (SA 1988.22) - and so scale apart, all sheep farmers in a neighbourhood had similar extra labour needs at the same point in the production calendar each year, and so economically it made sense to enter into exchange labour agreements which were seen to be mutually beneficial to all.

### *Gathering*

The gathering of sheep from rough grazings on the hillside could be a very time-consuming process, and so neighbours often combined their resources for this task, although the extent to which exchange arrangements were entered into seems to have been governed by tradition as well as by need. In most Highland Perthshire areas, it was the unit or farm which tended to dictate the neighbouring

pattern rather than the individuals. Thus, certain units were said to traditionally neighbour with certain other units irrespective of whoever happened to be working them at the time, and new occupiers tended to respect this. Jim Mollison's comment can be taken as being fairly typical:

That was tradition - my tenant before me, he had neighboured, and we just had the same squad came again. (SA 1988.22)

In many cases, the entire process, including the gathering and clipping of the sheep was carried out communally, but in certain circumstances the gathering was completed by members of the workforce of the host unit themselves before neighbours arrived to help with the clipping or dipping. This depended to a large degree on the size of the flock involved, but also on the extent to which the grazings were enclosed. Most units did not completely enclose their grazings, and so the sheep were free to wander over an extensive area of hill ground, mixing with neighbours' stock, and so the gathering process was made easier if carried out communally:

GW: So how did that work. If your farm was clippin, all the neighbours would come and help ye, is that right?

JF: That's right, up to an area - a certain area - and of course a lot o them had sheep and the sheep were wanderin onto their ground and that and they all worked together and got their sheep back that day. This farmer would maybe gather forty or fifty sheep belongin to other farmers. And they would be there and get their sheep at night, you see. And they worked - they worked together. Oh - all hand work, you know, all hand shearing. (SA 1988.20)

Jim Mollison's Glenshee holding, however, was totally enclosed and while he neighboured for the actual clipping process, he did not require help with the gathering:

JM: We had a totally enclosed hill so we didn't need help with the gatherings, the shepherd and I could gather the hill in about an hour and a half. It was just the way the fencing was. But up Glenshee, they had gathering. They used to start about four o'clock in the morning, you know, before the heat of the day...

GW: Is this because it was all unenclosed land?

JM: Yes. And a very big area. You see up at the Spittal of Glenshee, I think Finlay Cameron had about twelve hundred ewes. A thousand or

twelve hundred. And his land went right up to the Devil's Elbow from the Spittal. There was two sides divided by the river. It was a big job. Ours wasn't a big job as it was a totally enclosed hill.

GW: So they would help each other in that respect then?

JM: Up the Glen they did, yes, as the area was bigger.

GW: How did that work, did they all just go and bring them all in?

JM: Well they gathered, say the Spittal, and I don't know what cooperation there was up there at all. There was probably, it would be all the Invercauld tenants really, I think. There were three of them with very big hill areas. ... Now we weren't a big area. Well we had seventeen hundred acre with thirteen hundred hill, but it was split in two lots which made it easier to gather. (SA 1988.22)

Where neighbouring was employed for the gathering process, work normally began very early in the morning, perhaps even at 2.30 am, in order to have the sheep in the fanks ready for clipping by breakfast time. Successful and rapid gathering required a significant depth of local knowledge of the terrain as well as the skills of dog and sheep handling necessary to gather effectively and efficiently, and so again it made more sense for neighbours to enter reciprocal arrangements in order to help one another out rather than hire in 'outsiders'. Indeed, in the second half of the twentieth century, when traditional neighbouring arrangements began to break down in favour of the hiring in of outside 'squads' for clippings, the most common complaints were not related to the standard of their clipping skills, but rather the fact that they were not familiar enough with the terrain to ensure that all of the flock was gathered, and as a result, the number of 'missed' sheep was claimed to be increasing. More will be said below regarding the hiring of squads in preference to neighbouring traditions.

The size of the *neighbouring circle* - the number of units which reciprocated their labour - could of course vary greatly, but in some cases would number upwards of twenty. Smaller circles were more common however, for very large groups required considerable organisation if they were to run smoothly. Although the members mostly considered themselves 'neighbours', this term



could be interpreted very loosely and in actual fact they could live and work many miles apart. The oral evidence shows that there was a good deal of variety in terms of the size of the area within which it was considered convenient to neighbour. Certainly there were cases where people who did not live particularly close helped one another because of close ties of other kinds such as friendship or family relations, while in other recorded cases only those from the same glen would reciprocate in this way:

GW: Are you talking about mainly immediate neighbours - people who you actually physically neighbour with in terms of over the next boundary, or would you ever neighbour with someone three estates away or three tenant farms away? How wide is the circle?

AB: With us, a couple of them aren't our neighbours but they're in the same glen. I don't know of many places that do neighbour any long distance away. It is quite important if the weather goes, if you've got mainly a spell of six hours to gather, it's quite important to have the men there and go. There's nothing more annoying than saying 'right, we're going to gather' and it takes an hour and a half to get there, which it can do by the time they've got dogs together and the kit together, got the Land Rover, driven over here, stuck behind a few caravans, 45 miles per hour and it takes time. By then your gather is lost. (RCSS 13.7.94)<sup>107</sup>

The above extract refers to an area of Highland Perthshire where these arrangements still existed at the time of the interview, although they were just beginning to show signs of breaking up for reasons which will be addressed below. However, it shows that even with very modern transport available, it was considered inconvenient to have to rely on someone who had to travel more than a few miles to help and so the neighbouring circle in this case was kept very compact accordingly.

In the interviews which referred mainly to neighbouring arrangements which were operating earlier this century, however, this point of view does not tend to appear, and the concept of speed seems to have been less of an issue. In the

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<sup>107</sup> All the interview extracts referenced 'RCSS' in this thesis are from recordings I made while working on a different research project in which all informants were given guarantees of anonymity. As such, the names, initials and farm names have been disguised.

extract above, the informant owned a small estate, and so as well as being an active farmer he was also involved in running a variety of business activities from his estate base. Diversification was seen to be essential for survival and so tourism-based activities took up a lot of his time and effort. This is important, for in such circumstances the farming context is altered somewhat in that it has to be made to fit into a wider economic planning scheme. To most of my older informants, such matters were of no concern and while the speed at which work was conducted was still of great importance, travel time was an accepted part of the neighbouring process: the speed was achieved by bringing many neighbours together to work as a team.

With large neighbouring circles it was a very complex process to ensure that the workforce arrived at the correct farm on the correct day, and so in most cases these arrangements were formalised into an agreed rota.

GW: So how was it organised - where you went and when, was there set patterns each year as to which farms you went to which day...?

JF: Aye, well most o them just had the same dates. But the whole thing could go wrong if it was a wet day, mist or anything like that they couldn't gather. And that...upset the whole programme. We had to go back - and I've seen men - this man we went back so far that this man was first but he had to wait till his turn came and it went round again before he got into it you see. Well you see many's the time it was that wet that they went wrong, you see. You couldn't clip and you couldn't gather on these hills if there was mist, you see. (SA 1988.20)

In some cases the order in which the farms were visited by the group *en masse* was rotated each year to ensure fairness in a system reminiscent of the principles of run rig, while in other circles each unit kept to the same date each year. The reason commonly given for this, was that location was all-important, and that even in a very localised area, the stock on some farms tended to be ready for clipping before others, and so it made sense to arrange the order of visits accordingly:

GW: So how do you decide who is going to gather on which days?  
Again going back to when it was a big thing and you were taking fifteen,

twenty neighbours and they used to have a rota and it would change each year, you'd move round one -

AB: Traditionally it's always been east to west. East is first, I think probably because their ewes are a little bit further on because of the weather. That's the only way it used to go. I don't know how it can make such a difference in a local area. Also A~ is quite a hard hill for sheep. I'm not saying they're not as good, but they take a bit longer to come on, especially when it comes to clipping time. There is no point clipping them early because the rise hasn't matured on the wool so there is no point clipping it. Whereas I~, Al~, L~ are all ready. It always seems to be L~, I~, A~ and by the time A~ is finished it's back to I~ again or L~. One or the other. (RCSS 13.7.94)

### *The Clipping Process*

Clipping was undoubtedly a very skilled process, and so it was not the kind of task which could be undertaken by hiring casual labourers. This was another reason why exchanges between recognised shepherds and sheep farmers were found to be very useful and helps to explain why this form of communal labour arrangement was the most tenacious in its survival.

At least one nineteenth century agricultural expert (with Perthshire connections) saw obvious advantages in the principle of communal clippings as well as gatherings, for the competitive atmosphere engendered by these occasions was seen to be conducive to clean and fast work:

It is customary for neighbouring shepherds to assist each other. The emulation amongst a number of men clipping together not only expedites the shearing of the individual flock, but makes the work cheerful, and calls forth the best and quickest specimens of workmanship from each clipper. (Stevens 1889 Vol IV: 442)

Of all those attending a work party of this kind, perhaps only half of them would carry out the actual clipping, while the rest would be allocated support jobs, such as the *crockers* whose task it was to catch the sheep in the fanks and take them to the clippers where the animals' legs would be tied and they would be turned upside down ready to be clipped. Others were involved in removing the fleeces from the clipping area and taking them to a central point where they were loaded

into enormous sacks each holding around four dozen fleeces ready to be transported to the wool merchants who bought them directly. One man had the task of standing inside the sack to trample down the fleeces, before sewing it once it was full. These sacks were tied to large poles embedded vertically in the ground to allow easy loading of the fleeces, and a stone was placed in the corner to prevent interruption from the wind. A full account of this process is given by John Fisher in SA 1988.20.

Clippers tended to develop their own styles, and as was the case with ploughmen, certain individuals began to earn themselves reputations for their speed and accuracy. John Fisher, for instance, was one of the few clippers who worked with both hands at once, and preferred to sit on the ground rather than use a stool. While he did not claim to be the 'best clipper in the country' he was certainly in high demand for his skills, and on average attended around twenty-five clippings each year. Interestingly, he did not always take part under an exchange arrangement, for at times he was hired for payment, although this was certainly rather rare. (SA 1988.20)

### *Dippings*

Exchange arrangements were also employed for dipping sheep as this was another labour-intensive, although less skilled task which all shepherds and sheep farmers had to carry out in order to protect their flocks against disease. Indeed it was a legal requirement that all sheep be dipped, and a police officer was required to be present at a dipping to testify to the fact that the process had been carried out satisfactorily:

And of course now they've two compulsory dippins. It's official now you see. They've got scab. There were a lot o sheep on these big places there and they weren't gatherin them in you see. And there'd be some o them wi three fleeces on and they'd never been clipped. And of course what happened was that scab broke out - what they called scab, this disease, and the sheep were itchy and all the fleeces, the wool would come off their backs and a hell o mess. So they had to gather all the



sheep off the hills by the Ministry of .. Board of Agriculture made a rule and it was a police business again. It was absolutely official dippins. And you had to sign a form you see. And you had to notify the police when you were going to dip and there would always be a policeman there to see that it was done properly. That was to get rid o the - in fact this North side here, it's a wild country area, there was six sheep they couldn't get. The deer were there - the deer didn't take scab - and there were six sheep. And they were that bloody wild that they were going with the deer and that and they had to shoot them wi rifles. They had to get these sheep. There was three or four fleeces on them. And they were careless, you see, it was absolutely careless. And the dips weren't very brilliant in these days. Some o them hot dips and that. Now they dip much more - well it's much better dip now, and it seems to keep the scab down. But if you didn't dip these sheep you would have scab, there's no doubt about it. (SA 1988.20)

In many cases the dipping coincided with the clippings, and so the membership of the circle remained the same.

### *Food and Drink*

As was the case with neighbouring for the purpose of threshing grain, the communal consumption of food and drink was also an important and integral part of these exchange labour gatherings for sheep clippings. Again this aspect of these arrangements often seems to have been at the forefront of my informants' memories when talking of the neighbouring process. It was obviously seen to be an essential component of the day's proceedings, and all talk very fondly of the meal times and alcohol consumption in their narratives. Indeed, one informant even suggested that one of the principal reasons for the eventual demise of the neighbouring phenomenon was the introduction of the breathalyser! A few extracts will serve to illustrate the importance of this aspect of these gatherings:

GW: But there was no payment involved, it was just you come and help us and...

JF: No, no payment. Great bloody feeds and that. Food was excellent. Everyone competin against the other to see who could put up the best dinner for the men (laughs). (SA 1988.20)



JM: But the old ones - well not just the olds ones - the old Glenners were sorry to see the neighbouring going. At one time it was an awful whisky drinking carry on but not once the breathalyser came in!

GW: Would there be food provided ...?

JM: Oh, yes. It was an eating day. We got a mid morning break - a midyer - then they had full food in the house and then half way through the afternoon, another midyer. And then when we finished we used to always come to the farmhouse for high tea. They enjoyed themselves. There was usually a whole ham. (SA 1988.22)

Mrs M: You could say really that the social side of these gatherings has gone. Because if they came to work at your farm they more or less stayed well into the night.

JM: Oh yes, on some of the places they had a ceilidh. At some clippings I mean the whisky was desperate.

Mrs M: And they didn't get home until the next day.

JM: Oh no, some of them didn't get home.

GW: So everybody would stay just after the food...

JM: Some o them wouldn't be fit to go home! Old Donald down here - he was connected with the Atholl Estate, and he talks about some o the Glen Tilt clippings, etc., and they had a great big copper pot and seemingly that was taken up to the fanks or the bughts whichever they call them and a whole sheep used to go in, cooked it. I suppose it would be a broth too, you see. But the whisky was - flowed freely. (SA 1988.22)

### **CD Track 11**

GW: But there was no payment involved, it was just you come and help us and ...

JF: No, no payment. Great bloody feeds and that. Food was excellent. Everyone competin against the other to see who could put up the best dinner for the men (laughs).

GW: So how many would be workin at once?

JF: Well maybe about, sixteen clippers. A total of about thirty maybe.

GW: And you'd have to supply the food for all o them, would you?

JF: Yes, aye the farmer had to supply the food. And he got a his sheep done. It was only one meal they had to supply because the folk that was out gatherin - I was gatherin and you'd go out.. maybe leavin here two o'clock in the mornin. Half past two maybe, we'd leave. Come up here and be up here just at daylight, you see. And you'd get the sheep in - we'd be in the fank with the sheep about six o'clock in the morning. And then we got our breakfast ... Then you see, that was that - breakfast, excellent breakfast. When I went to Tynayare first I used to take the breakfast up before I started clippin. And then there was a tea

came up again about ten o'clock and then when you were finished well - there was fifteen, sixteen clippers they weren't all - they'd do the clippin in two hours. And the thing was we - you got down to the house again - well, up in the fank you got a dram wi the ten o'clock tea, he went round and the man gave everybody a dram. And then when you came down for your dinner there was a dram on the table for everybody. But you were eatin a the time. Bloody great! (laughs). I thought so anyway. I loved it. I loved the thing. (SA 1988.20)

It's still a fairly social thing because you're normally fed wherever you come and at the end of the day you're going to have a dram and a couple of beers. ... You used to have a few beers. Yes, I suppose it has if you looked at it. It has changed but there's still dances, there's still evenings - probably not as many as there used to be. Everyone takes a car. Sometimes they're not going to drive or you stay the night, that's all it comes down to. (RCSS 13.7.94)

The final extract reveals that the social component of neighbouring has remained important right into the 1990s in those areas where it continues to survive, and in some cases it is even possible that this was the main reason for their temporary continued survival even after the more practical and economic advantages of these traditional neighbouring arrangements had ceased to exist. The comment (RCSS 1.7.94) that the amount of money generated from the sale of wool was barely sufficient to cover the costs of providing the food and drink for the neighbours is testimony to this. Similarly another farmer's quip that '... a lot of the time they neighboured for the crack - there wasn't a lot o work goin on' (RCSS 11.8.94) adds further weight to this thought. Nonetheless, the social element of exchange labour gatherings was not in itself strong enough to ensure their continued use over an indefinite period and any continuance due to such secondary reasons proved temporary.



**Photograph 4.c**  
*Communal Sheep Clipping, Aberfeldy, c. 1900*  
 School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh BIV 5 b2 2959



**Photograph 4.d**  
*Communal Sheep Clipping, Ballinluig, c.1900*  
 © Landmark Press

### *The Decline of Neighbouring for Clippings*

Although a certain number of exchange labour agreements among sheep farmers continue to exist in the hill areas of Perthshire, there is little doubt that the phenomenon has greatly declined over the past few decades and indeed continues to do so. There appears to be a number of factors involved in this trend, all of which were recognised by my informants, although some emphasised different reasons from others. Technological advancements were thought by some to be a root cause of the disappearance of 'the old ways' as such innovations as electric clippers and indeed the erection of massive sheds which allowed for indoor clipping, combined to greatly speed up the clipping process and thus reduce the need for units to seek help from their neighbours:

But it was really the machine clipping I think that made people more independent, cause they clipped a few at a time inside. But in spite of that, the old hand clippers could get finished just as quick. Cause there's some o the old hand clippers was just tremendous. ... Yea. As they got machines clipping themselves and maybe a sheep shed up, they felt more independent. (SA 1988.22)

There can be little doubt that within the realm of agricultural production in general, increasing development and adoption of technology reduced the requirements for human labour, and most exchange labour agreements were of course primarily designed to provide extra labour cover when it was required. It is of no surprise then, that technology should be viewed as being one of the principal catalysts of the demise of this tradition.

As John Fisher demonstrates, however, technology may well have played a role in this, but it was not the only explanation put forward by those involved:

Neighbourliness. It was a great thing, you know. We lost that. **We lost that wi money.** Of course machines have killed it, you know. (SA 1988.20 - my emphasis)

Increasing emphasis on 'money' is undoubtedly a factor in the virtual disappearance of the neighbouring circle in Perthshire and indeed beyond.



Changing economic contexts began to reshape attitudes as individuals started to look more closely at their relationships and agreements with their neighbours. The relaxed attitude typified by John Menzies when he suggested that exact reciprocity was of little importance within the tradition, undoubtedly began to be challenged as a reaction to the increasingly harsh hill farming economic climate which began to emerge from the 1960s. Thus, if circle members decided that it no longer made economic sense to neighbour then they simply dropped out of the agreement.

The informant featured in the extract below continued to neighbour up until a few weeks before this interview (1994), when two members of the circle had decided not to continue with the arrangement. His narrative is quoted at length here as it provides an excellent insight into the thought process of an individual who himself was keen to remain actively involved in an exchange agreement, but who was obviously extremely aware of the economic principles which underlay, and indeed ultimately destroyed the tradition:

AB: A lot of hill farms neighbour anyway. The term 'neighbour' where one member of staff goes and works for them, and depending on how many members of staff they have, they come back. There will always be problems because we are all different people. We all have different views, different ideas but certain people get on and certain people don't get on. If we want a living to earn we've got to get on eventually. We're all going to the same place so we might as well try and get on as much as possible. There are always going to be different opinions. But we're all farming, we're all trying to make ends meet so it does work. We neighbour quite well. ... It happens for the clipping, the gathering and certain types of clip. It's also going to be an issue where, if that certain chap is going across to work for another farm, whether the standard of work that he's getting back is equal to that he's putting in and I think that's really the main bone crushing issue. If it's not, then there will always be resentment.

GW: So standard - actually quality rather than quantity?

AB: Quality will be the key issue. If you go over there and you're clipping five sheep to two men who are clipping two sheep each and they come back to you and you've clipped five sheep and they've only clipped four sheep for two men, then you feel that bit peeved that you're not getting the same degree of work.



GW: If you send your shepherd to a farm who say had three shepherds, would all three of them come back?

AB: It normally works that way. We used to neighbour with P~ and two of the tenant farms but there's been a slight change with the two tenant farms. So for one man going there it normally works out it's swings and roundabouts at the end of the day but he would normally be going there for longer because if there's two men there it will be a longer clip, a longer gather. They would probably be gathering over two days there so you would be there two days. It all depends on the standard of man that's going there and how many dogs he's got. If he's just one man with one dog and he's one man with three dogs, then his input is considerably more, and also how experienced, how well he knows the hill and how hard he is prepared to work. Again, there's a changing of attitudes where hill farmers have always worked till the job has been done but shepherds are changing. Shepherds are coming in from college and places where they've only worked from eight till five or eight till four and at four o'clock they blow the whistle and they go home. Whereas quite often the way the weather is, you can only start gathering at ten o'clock, you finish the gather, you want to get the sheep through the fank and dried in a shed. There's no way you are going to finish by four. So this is an attitude which people are coming up against. The neighbour - you send a man over to them, they knock off at four o'clock and it means you've got to go back the next day whereas you could have got the job done, finished and back. It's really up to making sure you're getting comfortable like for like at the end of the day. (RCSS 13.7.94)

This farmer and estate owner certainly expected the reciprocity to be as balanced as possible, although he was experienced enough to realise that in reality this was not always the case. He was also aware of the inherent problems of personality, but again suggested that it should be possible to overcome such minor distractions for the mutual economic benefit of the partners involved. Changing attitudes of successive generations towards the work ethic are also identified here as bringing detrimental influences to the viability of neighbouring arrangements. The combination of these factors was such that this informant was not at all surprised that two of his neighbouring partners had recently decided to bow out of the relationship making it unrealistic for the two remaining partners to carry on.

Further light is shed on this particular case within an interview with one of his neighbouring partners (but not one of those who had decided to stop), another estate owner within this north-west Perthshire glen (PL). Also present were her husband (AL) and daughter (LD):

AL: They do combine doing the foxes and that sort of thing. The other form of neighbouring which went on till this year was for sheep gathering and clipping and that sort of thing. The tenants suddenly announced they weren't going to neighbour any longer.

PL: So that's an added expense really.

GW: So that means hiring -

PL: Well it means hiring, you see. It means hiring clippers too at 45p a skull and there is over two thousand. It's an extra.

GW: Is there any reason why people are - you said the tenants announced they weren't going to?

PL: I don't know.

GW: Is that down to fall-outs and things?

LD: I don't think it's so much that. I think the problem is - for instance, the tenants on this farm, there is only father and son, and if they're helping us on the farm down the road, that's maybe two days they lose. They then help us on our farm up the way and that's maybe another two or three days. I think G~ worked it out that, with all the neighbouring, you're losing thirty days when you could be making your silage or you could be doing something on your own farm. I think it was B~ who started off and I suppose he's getting on and finding that climbing the hills for three weeks non-stop is just getting too much.

PL: Why the others gave up, we haven't - they just said, Oh well, B~ started it, we'll follow suit'. But they still go to each other, don't they?

AL: Yes.

LD: Some of them do. I don't know who goes to who. I know yesterday, N~ appeared and P~ appeared and A~ from Glen~.

PL: But they're all freelance people. Anyway, now we have to pay for doing it. As I say, that's an added expense. But still, in a way you're sort of let off the hook because we make our own plans and go ahead. We don't have to think, 'I wonder when so and so wants to go?'

LD: Yes. I suppose it works both ways.

PL: We don't seem to get by any quicker really.

GW: Would you only have neighboured with tenanting farmers or would you neighbour with other whole estates?

PL: Well we neighboured with the estate next door to us. They employed one man so he couldn't possibly do it by himself. He was one of the ones that, when we rang up and said 'What's your plans and when do you want to go?' and he said he didn't want to neighbour anymore. Otherwise, it was really the people who were next door to you who

neighbouring in the old days. Like the farmer at the end of the road there, they neighbored with this farm here. I don't know why. It was a different estate. They never neighbored east of the way but they neighbored with us west. We never neighbored with B~.

AL: Not over the next glen. It was a lateral thing. One didn't go over the watershed. (RCSS 23.8.94)

It would appear from this conversation that the tenants who had decided not to neighbour any longer with PL had realised that they were losing out on the arrangement as the reciprocity was not balanced, but was in fact weighted in favour of the larger units. Unfortunately, there is insufficient information here to ascertain to what extent that was actually true in terms of labour hours exchanged, but in contrast to our case study of John Menzies's grain threshing discussed above, whereby he asserts that 'it balanced itself out', the conclusion arrived at by the tenants here was that a fair balance was not being achieved. The suggestion that they were continuing to neighbour with *each other* suggests that they were not against the concept of neighbouring in principle, but that the economic balance had to be taken into account.

Of course other reasons for this decision cannot be discounted: personality clashes, class issues (the tenants continued to neighbour with each other but not with the estate owners), protests etc., could all potentially play a role in such cases, but of course no conclusions can be drawn on such points without a much more detailed insight into the circumstances being achieved.

As was explained in the extract above, if large units could no longer rely on the neighbouring tradition for sheep clippings, then they were forced to hire in waged contractors to do the job. In some cases local shepherds (perhaps even former members of the same neighbouring circle) were willing to undertake such a role, for time permitting, this provided a good chance for them to supplement their income, and if they were involved in the gather as well as the clipping, they brought with them the local knowledge of the terrain which many considered

essential. However, since the 1970s, much of the gathering and clipping work of Highland Perthshire has been undertaken by outside specialist squads who travel around the British Isles making their living in this way. Many of these squads are made up of clippers from the Southern Hemisphere, brought up in this art, and taking some time away to travel in Europe:

A lot of the clippers are New Zealanders and Australians and that. The boy in Lochearnhead gets them in. It's them that's clippin most of the sheep round this area, I think.(RCSS 11.8.94)

These contractors normally charge a rate per head of sheep - around 45 pence in 1994 - which amounts to a considerable expense for those holdings which ran flocks of several thousand. This meant that the cash outgoings over a year would be significantly increased, although it did of course release the home labour force from obligations to their neighbours, freeing them up to undertake other tasks. For many, this was obviously viewed in economic terms as adequate compensation, as the virtual extinction of the neighbouring tradition clearly shows:

Well we used to neighbour with G~ but most places were too big so you were gathering every day of the summer. You had nine men and maybe only five of them doing the work. That's what offended. Half of them were only doing their share. We weren't getting on any quicker and found it a lot harder really. We just work on our own like. There's my son and two shepherds so there's the four of us (RCSS 11.8.94)

While a few hill farmers in Highland Perthshire continue to neighbour in small groups to this day, the tradition appears to be on the verge of extinction. Nonetheless, this form of communal labour was undoubtedly the one which survived longest and it has thus been invaluable in the present attempt to try to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the Perthshire neighbouring tradition.



## Miscellaneous Uses of Exchange Labour

While the largest communal work gatherings organised on an exchange basis in Perthshire were arranged for threshings and sheep clippings, these were by no means the only activities which utilised such reciprocal arrangements. Certainly, on the larger, rigidly-organised units of the Carse regions of the Lowland part of the County, there is little evidence for the use of exchange labour outwith that associated with the arrival of the travelling mill, but in those areas where smaller, family-run farms proliferated any number of daily or seasonal tasks could involve neighbour reciprocity of this kind. These could vary greatly in scale and form, depending on individual relationships and on the nature of the tasks being undertaken. In some cases, several neighbours would pool their resources to form work parties, while in others exchanges took place on a smaller scale, perhaps only involving mutual aid between two people.

In John Fisher's experience in the Glenlyon area, just about any farming task could involve neighbour help of some kind:

### CD Track 12

There was more neighbourliness in these days than what there is now. There wasn't so much - folk weren't livin just for money entirely. It was more community spirit, you know, which you don't get nowadays. Money's done all that out. ...Most things, potato lifting, there was four farms and the biggest farmer maybe the man who owned the digger he got the choice o the first date. Well you went and you helped him, you see, and this digger goin and there'd be two would go from us and four and six and - some tinks there as well - but mostly, big organisation. You'd lift an acre in a day. And I always was at the pit, I never ... and two of us at the pit puttin earth on the potatoes and bracken and straw and that kept us goin. Rather interestin too.

GW: So you would do that on a neighbourin farm and ...

JF: Oh yes, three or four farms we worked in and we all worked together.

GW: So you just went round each farm in turn?

JF: That's it and you couldn't cope with it if you were at it on yer own. Och it'd be- and then there was a man had the digger you see. Horses pullin it of course.

GW: So there was no money involved in that. It was just reciprocal?

JF: No money. Just the change o labour you know. There was an awful lot o that happened in these days.

GW: Was there? What other things can you think of?



JF: Well, even haystacks... You made these coils o hay out in the field and then ... we hadn't got a racklifter but Culdermore had one and Croftgarrow had one and they would have two racklifters and they would put in nearly all our hay in one day, you see. Where as if we were workin away at it it would be hopeless. And that went on and nearly everything on the farm. Neighbourliness. It was a great thing, you know. (SA 1988.20)

Clearly, much of the exchange which took place in this area centred around the sharing of machinery and implements as well as labour, for many units situated on these fairly marginal haugh and hill lands were unable to afford modern equipment such as potato diggers, and racklifters for hay harvesting. They could of course have got by through traditional methods, but if a neighbour did have such machinery then it seems to have been to their mutual benefit to operate on an exchange basis: those who were lending equipment received labour hours in return, although again, to what extent the reciprocity was balanced is unclear.

This concept of sharing implements as well as labour has deep historic roots: as was demonstrated in Chapter Two, it was common for joint-tenants in the pre-improvement fermtouns to each provide a horse or ox to the communal plough team, and the ploughs themselves were often jointly owned. This of course comes down to basic principles of economy of scale, and survives into the present in the phenomenon of the machinery ring, where large groups of farmers from within a certain area - perhaps a county, or indeed several counties - set up centrally administered cooperatives which purchase expensive and specialist machinery which can be hired by the members as required. This is essentially a continuation of the agricultural cooperative movement which began life in the late nineteenth century, and which, although perhaps inspired by traditional attitudes towards mutual aid, is an enormous topic in its own right which lies outwith the scope of the present study.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> A useful account of the genesis of formalised agricultural cooperatives in Scotland is given in Henderson T G 1929.

In Perthshire today, there is very little evidence of the continued survival of a strong exchange labour tradition, but it has not yet disappeared completely. Indeed, there are small signs that some farmers are rekindling old understandings for certain tasks, not to satisfy pangs of nostalgia, but for sound practical and economic reasons. One possible reason for this is the fact that most units have cut their regular labour force back to such a minimum level that they find that occasionally, certain tasks cannot be undertaken successfully by themselves and so they seek help from outside. The obvious place to go for this is the neighbouring farm, particularly if they are aware that these workers share the same predicament, and thus they may agree to exchange their labour to avoid the need to pay for help from elsewhere.

One relatively new task which has appeared on the farming scene is the wrapping of silage in black polythene sheeting, a practice which has been found to maintain the moisture and nutrients of the feed cheaply and efficiently. The bales are large, and have to be quickly in order to achieve high quality:

Now, I think - well we work quite a lot with two other neighbours. Silage wrappin and things like that, because we dinnae have enough staff to do it. Well, we could do it but it would be that slow. And we're all doin it at the same time. So we just combine. You know, there's more o that back in now. But there never was for the last twenty or thirty years. But it's beginning to come back now because ye're short o staff and some o these jobs the more staff you have the quicker you do the job.(SA 1998.23)

To what extent this apparent revival of neighbouring will develop into a trend remains to be seen. It may be that once technology catches up and equipment is developed to undertake such new tasks with fewer hands, then the need for exchange labour will again diminish, particularly if machinery rings provide affordable access to these implements. Such a scenario would perhaps suggest that neighbouring may reappear from time to time as a stop gap measure to plug temporary gaps in the progress of technology. Time alone will tell.

## Exchange Labour - Closing Remarks

In this chapter I have attempted to show that heavy reliance on reciprocal labour arrangements between neighbours did not disappear with the phasing out of joint- and multiple-tenancies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but remained a central feature of social organisation within rural Perthshire throughout much of the post-improvement period. Farmers continued to utilise neighbour help for several major tasks within the seasonal work cycle without cash transactions taking place, particularly in the *hill* and *haugh* areas where 'manifest neighbourliness' (Mann 1954: 164) remained strong until the last third of the twentieth century. In the carse lands where larger units were common, neighbourliness was more latent but exchange labour continued to be commonly employed for the specific purpose of grain threshing. As Chapter Five below explains, although often latent, the neighbouring principle remained strong enough even in the carse areas to also support a continuing tradition of charity labour gatherings well into the twentieth century.

Exchange labour survived while it was seen to bring practical benefits to its participants and as long as the local economic context allowed it to do so. In the second half of the twentieth century its function began to be questioned as new technological innovations rendered the jobs for which it was commonly employed less labour intensive. Neighbouring began to be viewed by many as more of a burden than an asset, and although most lamented its demise, the tradition all but dissolved. But why the lament? The reason seems clear. While exchange labour existed because it brought logistical and economic benefits to those taking part, it also played a more subtle and yet vital function within local society. It helped to forge a sense of neighbourhood belonging and identity, providing a network of professional and social bonds upon which a feeling of community could be built. Along with charity labour, exchange labour quite simply brought people together. The full implications of these points are discussed at length in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CHARITY LABOUR

While the preceding chapter examined the phenomenon of exchange labour arrangements within Perthshire, involving varying degrees of reciprocity, this chapter is concerned with work which was carried out on a non-reciprocal basis.

**The term charity labour, here refers to non-paid, non-reciprocal communal work practices involving members of separate agricultural units.**

The word 'charity' is used cautiously, however: as we shall see, while some recipients of this labour were certainly 'in need', others patently were not. Thus, the charitable factor involved is related to the offering or giving of help, as opposed to the need to receive it. This issue will be addressed at length in the analysis following the ethnographic report based upon evidence relating primarily to Perthshire.

As was also the case with the previous chapter, the principal research sources for this section were oral testimonies, although this particular aspect of communal labour was also relatively well served by local newspaper accounts dating from the mid to late nineteenth century. Few other forms of documentary source searches proved fruitful, however.

This research has shown that while a number of tasks could be carried out using charitable work gatherings, most within Perthshire were related to some aspect of the agricultural production process. Indeed, the most commonly undertaken task involving this form of labour was ploughing. Charity work could be carried out on a very casual basis by just one or two individuals, or indeed could involve the organisation and mobilisation of large working parties. By their very nature,

the smaller gatherings are more problematic to study simply because of their casual form, while the large gatherings seem to have been viewed as significant events worthy of coverage in local newspapers, and so access to information has been much easier for those gatherings at the larger end of the communal labour spectrum. Any 'measurement' of this phenomenon, however, must still remain tentative: only the largest gatherings are likely to have been reported in the press, for instance, and so any conclusions must be based primarily on evidence which is essentially qualitative in character. We may not be able to identify exactly how many such gatherings took place in any given community in any given year, but we can seek to discover what form they took, who was involved and why, how and by whom they were organised, what immediate economic benefits they brought, and what wider roles they could be said to have played within the community at large.

### **The Lovedarg**

The word *lovedarg* was one of the most common terms used within Perthshire to refer to a work party which was formed on a given day to help out a specific member of the community who required aid. *Darg* (also appearing variously as *dairk*, *dark*, *dawerk*, OE *dæweorc*) is a Scots word originally meaning 'a day's work', but which also came to refer to the *results* of a day's work, or indeed, an area of land which could be worked in a day (SND). In modern usage it often refers to work in general, having lost its specific connection to 'a day', resulting in the common use of such phrases as 'a day's darg' or 'our daily darg'. However, within the specific context of the lovedarg, the temporal implication has remained relevant: I have failed to find an example of a lovedarg having lasted more than a single day. A lovedarg, literally then, is a day's labour of love - a 'kindness itsel' to use the words of one informant (SA 1988.20).

The Chamber's Scots dictionary defines the word as 'a friendly day's ploughing given to a neighbour', while the SND refers to it as 'a piece of work or service



done, not for hire, but merely for affection'. A Perthshire correspondent to the *SND* in 1928, one Major S A Forbes of Bankfoot, described the lovedarg as 'a gift day of service of horses, men, etc., by neighbour farmers to a new-come farmer'. This practice was also described by one of the Royal Commissioners investigating the employment of women and children in Scotland in 1867: in this case the custom was referred to as 'giving a day':

It is the custom when a new tenant enters for all the farmers in the neighbourhood to lend him a pair of horses and a plough for one day's work: this is called "giving a day". On one farm near Lesmahagow, I saw no less than 55 ploughs working at once on one of these occasions. (*Fourth Report*, 1870, evidence from R F Boyle)

The term 'ploughing day' has also been recorded in relation to this practice. Stephen, in his popular and wide-ranging *Book of the Farm* asserts

The first expenses incurred is the ploughing of the fallow-break, which, if done by hired labour, will cost 8s per acre, but if done by the goodwill of neighbours in a "ploughing day", which is the custom of the country, and is regarded as the earnest of a hearty welcome to a stranger ... (Stephen 1855, Vol 2: 516)

The terms 'ploughing darg', 'friendly darg', 'day's ploughing' and 'ploughing day' appear in 19th century local newspaper reports within Perthshire, and all seem to be synonymous with the term 'lovedarg' which is itself the most commonly used word within these accounts to refer to such gatherings.

Oral testimony reveals that a lovedarg could be organised for a wide variety of reasons, but these sources do serve to corroborate the evidence of Forbes, Boyle and Stephen outlined above by suggesting that one of the most common situations for its use was when a family moved into a farm, possibly taking over a tenancy for the first time. Most oral informants suggested that the prime reason for this action was to offer practical help, and to enable the new tenants to 'get on their feet'. Those who had just made the major transition in status from farm labourer to tenant would often not have had the time or indeed the resources to equip themselves fully in terms of implementation, labour or horsepower. The

giving of a lovedarg, usually in the form of a day's ploughing, helped to minimise the problems which this lack of resources would inevitably bring. Without such a helping hand, the new tenants would have found the first year very hard indeed, for without the necessary resources, of course, the season's production could be seriously jeopardised, and given the precarious nature of small-scale agricultural production, one bad season could plunge farmers into debts from which they might never recover. The first year of a tenancy was widely identified by informants as the most critical, and all were aware of the importance of 'getting a good start'. It was for these reasons, that Perthshire farmers and their employees appear to have been willing to give up a day of their own labour in order to attend a lovedarg:

### **CD Track 13**

GW: Does the name lovedarg mean anything to you?

JF: Lovedarg. Well a lovedarg is - that's different from a ploughin match. Say you took a farm over and you had no equipment yourself - you'd just put in to this farm. All the neighbours and that would come and plough the ground for ye. And that's what ye call a lovedarg. But a ploughin match...

GW: Did you see that happen around here?

JF: Oh yea. When we went into Tynayare in 1914 we had no horses and the neighbours all came, two pair from some farms and one pair - I think there was seventeen pair o horses came. And they ploughed the whole bloody lot. The redland and the lea and the stubble, they did a the ploughin in one day. Course they werenae like ploughin matches. They werenae wastin time in the finish or the feerin or anything, you know. Takin a bigger fur too.

GW: Did they just volunteer to do that. You didn't ask...it was just accepted..?

JF: No, a lovedarg. That was tae help ye start you see. Till ye got organised. It was great that altogether. It was kindness in itself.

It was important that as large a workforce as possible attend such a gathering in order to ensure that the work brought maximum benefits to the recipients, and to complete the necessary work in a single day, as those attending could not afford to neglect their own holdings for too long. Thus, lovedargs often involved impressively large numbers of workers: of the reports which quantify the number of workers attending, the largest was 52 men and pairs of horses, and the

smallest was 17. The mean number of participants was 30.25 men<sup>109</sup>. When we consider that these events normally involved ploughing - a task which was considered the most skilful of farm-related activities and which could therefore only be undertaken by trained ploughmen rather than by casual workers - we must view these figures as extremely impressive, in that in many cases they represent either a very large proportion of the skilled agricultural workforce from within an immediate neighbourhood area, or they show that workers were prepared to travel considerable distances in order to attend such gatherings. Unfortunately, the data are inadequate to allow greater precision on this point, but nonetheless, these lovedargs must be seen as major local events requiring much organisation and planning, as opposed to a few immediate neighbours casually helping out on a nearby farm.

While most accounts specify ploughing as having been the form of labour undertaken at a lovedarg to welcome new tenants to a farm, this was not exclusively the case. John Fisher recalls that on Tynayere in 1914, the neighbours did not stop after the ploughing was complete:

And not only were they ploughin the fields but they would sow it and harrow it - everything wis done. An maybe the potatoes wouldn't be put in, but it would be a prepared - the ground ready. (SA 1988.20)

This particular unit was a smallholding with just a few acres of arable production, and so with 17 pairs of horses operating at once, the ploughing was easily accomplished within the single day, with plenty of time to spare. Thus, the party simply kept going on to the next step in the ground preparation process. On larger units, however, ploughing alone was normally undertaken as this was all that could be successfully completed in one day. The concept which comes

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<sup>109</sup> This calculation is based on all available Perthshire references to the holding of a lovedarg. It includes oral sources, but as few informants could recall exact figures, most of the figures have been extracted from contemporary local newspaper reports.

through strongly here is that the neighbours were giving the newcomers a day's labour - a *full* day's labour but *only* a day's labour.

Coverage of lovedargs in contemporary local newspaper accounts from the nineteenth century clearly shows that such gatherings were treated as significant events within the local community. Rather than being viewed as clandestine offers of help carried out with the minimum of fuss in order to help someone in need, the press portrayed them almost as local carnivals deserving of celebration rather than as necessary acts of charity and a matter of embarrassment for the recipients. Most accounts do not only detail the number of participants, but estimate the number of spectators present, comment (always positively) on the standard of the work, and report on any speeches given, food and drink provided and in many cases give a potted character assessment of the recipient. Indeed, the reporters seem to have taken great care to avoid any implication that these events were acts of charity in any sense: emphasis instead was placed upon the esteem in which the recipients were invariably said to be held by the community at large. The following extracts give a flavour of the form of reporting which appeared in the *Perthshire Courier* in the middle decades of the nineteenth century:

Madderty - Friendly Darg:- On Wednesday last the farmers in this parish turned out to give Mr John Ritchie of Abbey Farm, a friendly darg to lift a field of old lea at Woodend. There were 21 ploughs on the ground at an early hour, and an excellent day's work was done. The ploughmen were liberally treated to refreshments, and were entertained by Mr Ritchie in his own house. Mr Ritchie is well known, not only in Madderty, but in all the Strath, as an experienced agriculturist, a kind master, and an honest man. (*Courier*, Feb 9th 1864)

Dalreoch - Ploughing Darg:- On Tuesday last Mr Robert Gardiner, Chapel Bank, who entered on a lease of this farm at Martinmas last, received a lovedarg from a few of his friends. About 8 o'clock, 52 ploughs started on one field. Both men and horses went over the ground in good order and their work was good. About half-past five o'clock, the field presented the appearance of seed time. The onlookers received a hearty welcome from Mr Gardiner, and were hospitably entertained.



We must also add that he did ample justice to the ploughmen. Long may such a man as Mr Gardiner be spared amongst us. We wish him every success in his new undertaking. (*Courier*, March 31st 1863)

Mr Robert Ewing Jun, having resigned the farm of Concraig and entered upon a lease of the farm of Fintalich which adjoins this village, his brother Farmers in the district turned out on Friday last, 11th inst. with 42 ploughs to give him a friendly darg. The day was most favourable and a great concourse of people from Crieff, Muthill, and the surrounding country came to witness the interesting scene. The emulation among the ploughmen was as great as in the most keenly contested ploughing match and the work was consequently executed in the most masterly manner. Mrs Ewing gave a most substantial luncheon to both farmers and visitors and in the evening, Mr Ewing gave all a flowing bowl at parting at which Mr Brydie, Mains of Drummond, presided, prefacing the toasts in his usual plain but pithy style. (*Courier*, March 17 1853)

All three of these accounts describe lovedargs, but these particular events seem to be rather different in emphasis from the form of charity labour received by Jock Fisher and his family in 1914. Indeed, none of the cases reported in the local press appear to have been driven by economic necessity at all, for the recipients were portrayed more as 'hosts', none of whom sound as though they were suffering hardship due to a lack of resources themselves. This point will be discussed at greater length below, but it seems that the principle of receiving a lovedarg when moving into a unit was a tradition which transcended social hierarchies within Perthshire, and which was not always governed by the concept of economic need.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> This tradition was also known elsewhere in Scotland, and certainly survived into the twentieth century in East Lothian. A report printed in the *Haddingtonshire Courier* on March 5th 1915 described a 'complimentary ploughing day' which was given to Mr Charles Beveridge, formerly of Rosyth who had recently taken over the tenancy of the farm of Elphinstone Tower. The reporter asserted that 'Mr Beveridges's neighbours were anxious to show him a little friendliness on settling amongst them, and sixty ploughs turned out and worked the whole day from early morning until dark'. Similar events were also reported in the *Haddingtonshire Courier* on March 16th 1900 when seventy ploughs turned out on behalf of a new tenant and January 31st 1902 when a more modest gathering of twenty ploughs took place. I am indebted to Mr David Sydserff for bringing these reports to my attention.



While lovedargs were certainly commonly held following the arrival of new tenants on a farm, this was by no means the only circumstance in which they took place. If a farmer or smallholder was seen to be in difficulty for some reason or another and was beginning to fall behind in his work, then the neighbours may well have thought it prudent to arrange a work gathering of this kind:

And we all helped one another: all helped. The lovedarg covered the whole thing. Somebuddie behind wi their work and ye all turned up wi yer plough and yer pair o horse and started plooin their field for them. Aye, that's been done in different times that I know of. ... Aye, oh the lovedarg wis a common thing. (William Adam, transcript in SLA 1985/44)

The reasons why he had fallen behind do not seem to have been deemed important, for all farmers recognised only too well the precarious nature of their production process and readily empathised with a neighbour in need. Perhaps if an individual began to regularly struggle and was viewed as lazy or incompetent by his peers, then sympathy would certainly have waned and no lovedargs would be arranged, but such exceptions apart, the lovedarg tradition operated successfully as an informal mutual insurance policy: in this case, the pay out was in the form of labour as opposed to cash.

Dave MacDonald recalls a lovedarg having been held on behalf of a widow whose husband had recently committed suicide:

I was at a lovedarg once at Newtyle - a place they called Davison. The farmer hanged himsel, and this what they called a lovedarg was given tae the widow, and a' the farmers roon aboot brought in a pair o horse or a couple o pair o horse - an yer grandfather (sic)<sup>111</sup> and I wis at that. The whole farm was ploughed in one day ... (SC 1986.16)

He remembers the fact that there was a large number of ploughmen attending on that particular occasion, but unfortunately could not recall enough detail to tell

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<sup>111</sup> This was actually a reference to my great grandfather, Dave Watson.

us whether this woman received ongoing help from the community in the following years, or whether the giving of a lovedarg was an emergency measure only. Implicit in most accounts, though, is the suggestion that such charitable gatherings were designed as a stop gap measure to help prevent immediate economic disaster until the recipients could again begin to cope by themselves, or until alternative arrangements could be made such as employing extra staff or indeed by giving up the tenancy. I would suggest, therefore, that it is unlikely that this widow's neighbours would have continued to provide this scale of support into the next seasonal cycle and beyond. Certainly smaller offers of casual help may have been forthcoming on an individual basis, but if further large communal gatherings had indeed been held, perhaps on an annual basis, then I suspect that Dave MacDonald would have known about them. These of course are the types of problems inherent in the use of oral testimony, as there is no predictable pattern to that which is remembered and that which is not. Nonetheless, this informant, despite his considerable age at the time of recording, was clear and consistent in his recollections of his early working life and was able to recall much detail regarding his farm labouring days. My tentative conclusion regarding this point, then, is that this particular lovedarg was likely to have been an emergency one-off measure organised by the community to help out their bereaved neighbours.

Of course, in this tragic case, the arrival of such a large workforce on the widow's farm would have had the effect of providing much more than just practical help. Such community action would also have acted as a spectacular and convincing display of moral support; it was a vehicle for the expression of sorrow and mourning for the death of one of their community, and a token of respect for his family. The lovedarg, then, performed a very similar function to the funeral in this case, and could arguably be categorised as an extension of the more common cultural traditions associated with the final rite of passage. These points will be discussed at greater length below.

The idea of charity being offered to those in need was grist to the mill for the kailyard novelists of the late nineteenth century, and it is perhaps no surprise to find the phenomenon represented in the work of one of the movement's champions, Ian MacLaren. His 1895 novel, *The Days of Auld Lang Syne*, includes a fictional account of a lovedarg which was organised to help out Milton, a cantankerous and unpopular local farmer who had fallen behind in his work through serious illness. In a plot which can be taken as the epitome of kailyard romanticism, Milton recognises the error of his ways when he witnesses the moving sight of twenty plough teams voluntarily working his fields together headed by Drumsheugh, his arch-enemy who had organised the whole event.

While the writing may be rather contrived and lacking in literary merit, the account may be considered important within the context of the present discussion. While the emphasis of the kailyard novelists has been widely recognised as being heavily over-romanticised, the authors did tend to draw extensively upon their own experiences of rural life, and there is no particular reason to suppose that MacLaren's depiction of the lovedarg was not in keeping with the nature of the tradition as he knew it. As detailed descriptions from this period are so scarce, it is worthwhile including this extract here in full:

Milton might have gone down to the grave condemning and condemned had it not been for his sore sickness, which brought him to the dust of death, and afforded Drumsheugh the opportunity for his most beneficent achievement.

"They think he may come roond wi' care", reported Drumsheugh, "but he'll be wakely for twa month, an he'll never be the same man again; it's been a terrible whup". But the kirkyard, for the first time in such circumstances, was not sympathetic.

"It's a mercy he's no been ta'en awa", responded Hillocks, after a distinct pause, "an' it'll maybe be a warnin' tae him: he's no' been unco freendly sin he cam intae the Glen, either wi' his tongue or his hands".

"A'm no' sayin' he hes, Hillocks, but it's no a time tae cuist up a man's fauts when he's in tribble, an it's no' the wy we've hed in Drumtochty. Milton's no' fit tae meddle wi' onybody noo, nor, for that maitter, tae manage his ain business. There's no mair than twa acre seen the ploo; a'm dootin the'll be a puir sowin'-time next spring at Milton."

"Gin he hedna been sic a creetical an' ill-tongued body the Glen wud sune hae cleared up his stubble. Div ye mind when Netherton lost his horses wi' the glanders, an' we jined an' did his ploo'in'? It wes a wiselike day's wark."

"Yer hert's in the richt place", said Drumsheugh, ignoring qualifications; "we'll haud a ploo'in' match at Milton, an gie the cratur a helpin' hand. A'm willin' tae stand ae prize, an Burnbrae 'ill no' be behind; a' wudna say but Hillocks himsel' micht come oot wi' a five-shillin bit."

They helped Milton out of bed next Thursday, and he sat in silence at a gable window that commanded the bare fields. Twenty ploughs were cutting the stubble into brown ridges, and the crows followed the men as they guided the shares with stiff resisiting body, while Drumsheugh could be seen going from field to field with authority.

"What's this for?" inquired Milton at length; "naebody askit them, an'...them an me hevna been pack (friendly) thae laist twa years."

"It's a love-darg", said his wife: "because ye've been sober (ill), they juist want to show kindness, bein' oor neeburs. Drumsheugh, a' hear, set it agaein', but there's no' a fairmer in the Glen hesna a hand in't wi' horses or siclike."

Milton made no remark, but he was thinking, and an hour before midday he called for his wife.

"It's rael gude o' them, an', wuman, it's mair than...a' wud hae dune for them. An', Eesie, ... gither a' thing thegither ye can get, and gie the men a richt dinner; and bid Jeemes see that every horse hes a feed o' corn...a fu' ane; dinna spare onything the day."

It was a point of honour on such occasions that food for man and beast should be brought with them, so that there be no charge on their neighbour; but Drumsheugh was none the less impressed by Milton's generous intentions. When he told Hillocks, who was acting as his aide-de-camp, that worthy exclaimed, "Michty!" and both Drumsheugh and Hillocks realised that a work of grace had begun in Milton.

He refused to lie down till the men and horses went out again to work, and indeed one could not see in it sown away a more heartening sight. Pair by pair our best horses passed, each with their own ploughman, and in a certain order, beginning with Saunders, Drumsheugh's foreman, full of majesty at the head of the parish, and concluding with a pair of hardy little beasts that worked the uplands of Bogleigh. A forenigh had been spent on preparation, till every scrap of brass on the high-peaked collars and bridles glittered in the sunlight, and the coats of the horses were soft and shiny. The tramp of the horses' feet and the rattle of the plough-chains rang out in the cold November air, which had just that touch of frost which makes the ground crisp for the ploughshare. The men upon the horses were the pick of the glen for strength, and carried themselves with the air of those who had come to do a work. Drumsheugh was



judge, and Saunders being therefore disqualified, the first prize went to young Burnbrae, the second to Netherton's man, and the third to Tammas Mitchell - who got seven-and-sixpence from Hillocks, and bought a shawl for Annie next Friday. Drumsheugh declared it was rig for rig the cleanest, quickest, straightest work he had seen in Drumtochty, and when the ploughs ceased there was not a yard of oat stubble left on Milton.

After the last horse had left and the farm was quiet again - no sign of the day save the squares of fresh brown earth - Drumsheugh went in alone - he had never before crossed the door - to inquire for Milton and carry the goodwill of the Glen. Milton had prided himself on his fluency, and had often amazed religious meetings, but now there was nothing audible but "gratefu" and "humbled," and Drumsheugh set himself to relieve the situation.

"Dinna mak sae muckle o't, man, as if we hed worked yir fairm for a year an' savit ye frae beggary. We kent ye didna need oor help, but we juist wantit tae be neeburly an' gie ye a lift tae health.

"A'body's pleased ye're on the mend, and there's no' ane o's that wudna be prood tae dae ony troke for ye till ye're able to manage for yersel'. A'll come roond masel' aince a week an gie a look ower the place." Milton said not one word as Drumsheugh rose to go, but the grip of the white hand that shot out from below the bed-clothes was not unworthy of Drumtochty. (MacLaren 1895: 328-333)

Most critics have concluded that the handful of popular novelists writing in the final decades of the nineteenth century who are normally grouped together under the kailyard label, created a picture of a sanitised and idealised rural Scotland, peopled by good, honest working men, bonnie subservient lassies and pious pillars of the community in the form of school masters and parish ministers. The social problems inherent in any society were swept under the carpet creating an image for the (mainly urban) readership of a Scotland untouched by the horrors of urbanisation and industrialisation.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> The main Kailyard writers were Maclaren (1850-1907), S R Crockett (1860-1914) and J M Barrie (1860-1937). Responsibility for the attachment of this epithet appears to lie with the critic J H Millar, writing in the *New Review* in 1895 (Shepherd 1988: 309). While the Kailyard school continues to be synonymous with sentimentality and over-romanticised domesticity, more recent revisionist critics have argued that there was more merit in some of this work than has hitherto been recognised (Campbell 1981; Donaldson 1986).



It is for this reason that the ethnographic value of any of the kailyard novels should not be over-estimated, but neither should it be dismissed without close consideration of its merits. In MacLaren's case, he was certainly writing from first hand experience of nineteenth century farm life, for although born in Essex of Gaelic speaking parents, he moved to Perthshire at the age of four and spent his formative years working on his uncles' farms in the Blairgowrie and Cupar Angus districts of Strathmore. One of his contemporaries was in no doubt that these experiences were central to his later writing:

Much of the colouring of the sketches of Drumtochty was borrowed from the Grange, and from the farms of his other uncles a few miles off in the neighbourhood of Blairgowrie. ... He had a minute knowledge of the details of farm work and farm life, long before he became minister of Logiealmond. It was on the large farms of Strathmore he got his insight into the seamy side of the life of farm-servants and the extra hands employed in harvest time, and in potato lifting. (Nicoll 1908: 16)

While the 'seamy side' of rural life was largely absent from his work, this does not in itself negate the value of his depiction of some aspects of farm existence. It was a feature of his work which was certainly recognised at the time, however:

But if in his literary sketches he idealised life on a Scottish farm, this was due not to ignorance of the grim realities but to his high conception of the moral functions of literature. (ibid.: 16)

His depiction of the phenomenon of the lovedarg, then, would have caused him few moral dilemmas, for this tradition of course could be viewed as representing the rural idyll incarnate. It is very likely that he would have witnessed these gatherings at first hand in Perthshire, and so fiction or not, this depiction of the workings of a lovedarg certainly provides a glimpse into the possible forms of group dynamics and social context within which they might operate. Milton was not considered to be a good neighbour, being unfriendly with both 'tongue' and 'hands', and there is an implication that the community had been slow to respond as a result of this. (They had been quick to come to the rescue of another farmer whose horses had been ill and unable to work.) But in the end, none of this mattered and the community spirit shone through. The significance of the deed

was played down to his face, presumably to reduce the flavour of charity - 'We kent ye didna need oor help, but we juist wantit tae be neeburly an' gie ye a lift tae health'. The fact that they made a sport of the occasion by introducing prizes would have served to strengthen this idea.

There is a certain amount of romance associated with the lovedarg tradition and it does no harm to recognise and celebrate it.

### *Labour Exaction*

One particular local press report from Perthshire points towards the existence of the concept of holding an annual lovedarg for a particular individual: the tenants on the Lindertis Estate near Airlie in the east of the county were in the habit of giving their landlord an annual day's ploughing in the 1860s. The *Perthshire Courier* referred to this event as a 'lovedarg' in a report in 1863:

Lovedarg:- On Tuesday the tenants on the Lindertis Estate, and other farmers in the neighbourhood, gave Sir Thomas Munro Bart. their annual day's ploughing on his home farm. Each man got his dinner and half a crown, and all were highly satisfied. The work was well done. (*Courier*, 29th December, 1863)

This report reveals that despite the use of the term 'lovedarg', the event did not adhere to our definition of charity labour as set out at the beginning of this chapter. As well as the usual supply of food, the tenants received half a crown each for their efforts, thus placing this example outwith the phenomenon of unpaid communal labour. Indeed, half a crown, or two and half shillings, was a good wage for a day's work: annual wages for the highest paid ploughmen in the area in 1860 ranged from L19 to L22, the daily equivalents of which work out at between 1 and 1.2 shillings (source - *Perthshire Courier* reports). On this basis, those attending Sir Thomas Munro's 'lovedarg' were receiving the equivalent of over two day's wages for a single day's work.

It seems clear that Sir Thomas, a baronet, did not need this help through lack of resources, a point backed up by his ability to pay the workers generously in both cash and kind. The use of the term 'annual day's ploughing' indicates that the

gathering could not have been held to mark a move to another farm. Rather, it seems likely that this was a lingering survival in adapted form of the principle of labour exaction as part of a rental agreement, a tradition which was usually phased out within Scotland during the sweeping reorganisations of farming practice and land tenure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The use of the term 'lovedarg' by the newspaper in this case may well be linked to the fact that the term 'darg days' was often used to refer to this provision of labour services by cottars or tenants to their landlords (SND). Before the tide of improvement engulfed Perthshire, the inclusion of labour services as part of rental demands was widespread. While I have been unable to trace records from the Lindertis Estate itself, there is ample evidence from elsewhere in the county that such an arrangement was still common in the late eighteenth century. In Breadalbane, for instance, its continued use in the 1770s was the cause of frustration among the tenantry, thirteen of whom in Lawers petitioned their landlord in protest against the services they were being forced to carry out at the busiest times of the year to the detriment of their own work schedules. Two neighbouring farms, Miltown and Tomb, 'for reasons unknown to the petitioners', had been granted some special privileges by the Earl of Breadalbane and were thus demanding the services of their thirteen immediate neighbours for four days in Spring, one day in Summer and two days in Autumn, including the use of their own horses and equipment. The tasks required included transporting dung, leading peats and shearing at harvest time (*Survey*, 1769 xxxiv).

Tacks being given by Charles Stewart to tenants on his Dalguise estates in the 1790s still included service demands as part of the rent due. A nineteen year tack offered to one John McIntosh of Glenalbert in 1793, for instance included the following services:

To winn and lead twenty cartloads of stones when required for fencing the bank of the water of Tay for which he is to have allowance at the rate of sixpence per load out of his said rent; to furnish the carriage of a

horse and cart from Dalguise to Perth<sup>113</sup>; to winn and lead two carts of [?] peats<sup>114</sup> besides driving five cart loads of peats from the hill to the house of Dalguise and furnish two days of a man to cast peats for the use of the proprietor. (SRO GD 38/1: 1125)

The six other surviving nineteen-year tacks awarded to Dalguise tenants in 1793 all included similar labour demands (*ibid.*: 1126-1131).

It is clear, then, that even those holding single-tenanted farms were in the habit of working on the holdings of their neighbours, or indeed on the home farm of their landlord, well after improvements had begun in Perthshire, although the reasons underlying this principle were certainly rather different to those at the root of most nineteenth and twentieth century lovedargs. They may not have been unconnected to what was happening each year on the home farm of Sir Thomas Munro, however. Arguably, the older principle of labour exaction was not only designed by landlords in order to get some of the more laborious tasks of the seasonal cycle done for them, but could also be seen as a form of status symbol - a manifestation of the power of the landed classes over their feudal inferiors. While by the 1860s the labour exaction principle had long disappeared, there is a strong scent of symbolism surrounding the Lindertis tradition. We cannot tell who was the driving force behind the event, or indeed what the tenants actually thought of their landlord as an individual, for the feast and the high wages would themselves surely have been attractive enough to ensure a high turn out. However, the idea of a large number of tenants and farmers turning out together to plough one's land, whatever recompense was offered, must surely have brought with it a high sense of prestige for the host. The tradition may have continued in this form at Lindertis, then, because it brought mutual benefits to those involved: the workers received good wages and a feast into the bargain, while Munro used it to buy status.

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<sup>113</sup> A round trip of around thirty miles.

<sup>114</sup> The word preceeding 'peats' is obscured.



Indeed, prestige appears implicitly to be at the root of many of the gatherings reported in the local press - gatherings which were all held on behalf of individuals who seem to have been of significant local standing in terms of class and wealth. One almost gets the impression that the reporters are measuring status by how many people turned out on the day, and it is quite possible that this attitude reflected the feelings of the recipients themselves:

Alyth:- Mrs Kidd having become tenant of the farm of Auchteralyth at Martinmas, her neighbours resolved to give her a friendly lift in the form of a day's ploughing. The number which turned out was twenty-nine; and but for the frost the previous night there would have been forty-six ploughs on the ground - no small proof of the estimation in which Mrs Kidd is deservedly held in the district. (*Courier*, 29th Dec 1863)

To what extent people such as Mrs Kidd were thought to be deserving of such action must remain a mystery, but the local press does show that certain local individuals were given a lovedarg as a token of appreciation for services rendered to the community over a long period of time. In 1852, for instance, a local minister in the parish of Redgorton in Strathearn received such an honour:

The farmers in this parish, with some others from the neighbouring parishes of Methven and Moneydie, having resolved to give a day's ploughing to our venerable and respected minister, Mr Liston, Tues. 17th inst. was fixed for that purpose. At an early hour that morning, no fewer than seventeen ploughs were on the ground. Mr Brown of Marlehall was present, and was kind enough to conduct the preliminary arrangements, and to see every man set to work. It was truly pleasing to witness the alacrity with which every one commenced the task assigned to him, as well as the extreme care and skill displayed in the execution of it: and by five o'clock in the afternoon the whole was finished in such a manner as reflected the highest credit on all parties engaged in it. This expression of kindly feeling, both on the parts of master and servants, towards our esteemed pastor, may be regarded as an evidence of the happy and harmonious manner in which the various religious denominations in this parish and neighbourhood are in the habit of deporting themselves towards each other. (*Courier*, Feb 26 1852)

Another, unconnected newspaper report reveals the Rev. Mr Liston as an excellent minister who was highly regarded by the locals and who was always ready and willing to visit parishioners in sickness and distress whatever their



religious adherence (*Courier* Nov 24 1851). Liston had been in post since 1812, but it is unclear why the lovedarg was offered on this particular occasion. It could not have been to mark his retirement, for he remained the minister for Redgorton until his death in 1864 (Scott 1869: 656). Having lost his wife in 1849, it is possible that his parishioners decided that a show of support of this kind would serve as a morale booster. More likely, perhaps, the gathering may have been called to celebrate his election to the post of synod clerk, an important administrative position in the regional church hierarchy which took effect two months after the lovedarg took place (*ibid.*). Whatever the motivation, it seems clear that this lovedarg was a symbolic gesture as much as a functional aid.

The same is true of another example of this appreciative form of lovedarg, in this case given to a local farmer who had for long doubled up as a vet:

A number of the farmers of this district determined to give Mr Andrew McGregor, farmer, Monzievaird, a day's darg, for his invaluable services as a veterinary surgeon for a series of years past:- accordingly, on Friday forenoon, 35 ploughs from the parishes of Crieff, Muthill, Monzievaird and Strowan commenced work: and after a good yoking, finished the field of about 18 acres in a highly satisfactory manner. The day being fine, a goodly number of spectators turned out to witness the proceedings. After the conclusion of the work a numerous party assembled in the Farm House, where a substantial dinner was prepared for them by Mrs McGregor. On the removal of the cloth, the healths of the worthy host and hostess were proposed and heartily responded to. Other healths followed, the song and sentiment went round until it began to draw near the "wee short hour" when the company broke up, highly pleased with the day's proceedings. (*Courier*, Feb 20 1851)

This report is relatively rich in information, although again it remains tantalisingly silent as to why the event was being held at that particular time. However, it does show that each worker must have ploughed on average around half an acre that day, that the event was of enough local significance to attract a considerable number of spectators and that the recipient and his wife acted as hosts at a substantial dinner and vibrant ceilidh afterwards.

## *Competition*

The theme of competition amongst the Perthshire farm labouring population has been examined briefly above, particular attention having been paid to the most formalised form of this - the ploughing match. On a superficial level, the lovedarg and the ploughing match appear to have been very closely related, and indeed there is some evidence to suggest that the two terms were sometimes viewed as being synonymous. From a spectator's viewpoint they would certainly have appeared very similar: both involved large gatherings of ploughmen and their horses, all operating simultaneously in the same field; both attracted spectators and often a representative from the local press, and both were often followed by a communal meal and perhaps music and dancing.

As already described, Ian MacLaren's fictional lovedarg took the form of a ploughing match in the presence of a judge and with cash prizes being awarded to the top three competitors. It is reasonable to assume that this was a practice known to the author. Henry Kinnaird, who remembers the lovedarg tradition in operation during the first half of the twentieth century, was certainly of the opinion that the competitive element often shone through in this form of charity labour:

When a farmer took over a tenancy it was common practice to give him a "love-darg". The neighbouring farmers would send some of their men to give him a day's ploughing to help him on his way with the work, especially if he'd entered the farm at the Martinmas term, when the day's were short.

"Lovedargs" were often treated as an informal ploughing match, with the men who had done the most and best being given a prize or reward in kind. These prizes were handed out by the farmer who had been given the "love-darg" and were usually a kebbuck of home-made cheese, fresh farm butter, eggs, even a young pig, or a pair of hand-knitted socks, worsted gloves or mittens. It was seldom that money was given, though a bottle or half-bottle of whisky were not unusual. Such prizes may seem small by modern standards, but in days when wages were small they were always appreciated by men with large families. Then, "lovedargs" were great social occasions, and there was always a certain amount of good-natured banter. (*Scots Magazine* July 1992)

Henry Kinnaird, in earlier correspondence, also remarked that if the recipient of a lovedarg was known to be 'no verra weel aff', then the organisers would provide the food for the company instead (*Dundee Courier*, July 11 1980)<sup>115</sup>, a point corroborated by the fictional lovedarg at Drumtochty in which the narrator remarks that it was customary for the volunteers to bring their own food and fodder with them (Maclaren 1895).

Further evidence that on occasions, lovedargs could be treated as ploughing matches can be gleaned from the *Perthshire Courier*. A report carried in 1863, relating to a recent event held in the parish of Dunkeld began

Ploughing Match:- A lovedarg came off on a park of old lea at Rohallion, belonging to Mr Condie, last week. (*Courier*, Feb 24th 1863)

The report goes on to list the names of prizewinners and judges in the usual manner of *Courier* reports on regular ploughing matches: the only feature which sets this one apart is the use of the word 'lovedarg'. This may be indicative of the fact that lovedargs and ploughing matches were considered one and the same thing there at that time, or that the reporter was simply mistaken and wrongly assumed that the terms were synonymous.

When talking at some length of ploughing matches in his *Book of the Farm*, Stephen implies that there was a link between these competitive events and charity labour, although he does indicate that they were not actually the same phenomenon:

Besides stated competitions, a day's ploughing is frequently given to incoming tenants by neighbouring farmers as a welcome into the district. (Stephen 1889 Vol 1: 104)

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<sup>115</sup> This is the only reference I have found to this practice, but it is likely that this would have been widespread in cases where lovedargs were given primarily out of need on the part of the recipient, as otherwise the provision of food for such large numbers may well have proved prohibitively expensive to the host.

His use of the word 'stated' suggests perhaps that while this welcome to a new neighbour was not an official competition, it may well have involved a less formal competitive feel.

Most of my oral informants, however, were adamant that lovedargs and ploughing matches were quite separate events, and that there was no element of competition in the charity gatherings:

... well a lovedarg is different from a ploughing match. ... They weren't like ploughin matches. They weren't wastin time in the finish or the feerin or anything you know - and takin a bigger fur too. ( John Fisher, SA 1988.20)

Dave MacDonald too remarked that the lovedarg 'wisnae a contest' (SC 1986.16). Their reasoning was that ploughing matches were serious competitive events, for which the entrants prepared for weeks beforehand polishing the harness and ensuring that their horses and equipment were presented in first class order. Many owned special competition harness, and on the day of the event their horses were specially decorated and immaculately turned out. This extra preparation was not carried out before a lovedarg in their experience. Also, the nature of ploughing competitions with different tests of ability (the 'finishin' and the 'feerin') resulted in the field being unfit for production following the match without further attention. This would have defeated the whole purpose of the lovedarg.

The evidence regarding the relationship between lovedargs and ploughing matches is therefore rather contradictory, and seems to indicate that within some communities there was a strong link between them while in others there was not. Nonetheless, the two phenomena are close enough to one another in form, if not function, to raise questions as to their respective origins. It is quite possible, for instance, that the idea for organised events in which the skills of the participants were judged by an expert, emerged from an older tradition of charity labour gatherings, which themselves may have had an inherent informal competitive



feel. Due to a paucity of solid evidence, however, this idea must remain simple hypothesis.

### *Further Uses of the Term 'Lovedarg'.*

While the labour services involved within the lovedarg tradition most often involved ploughing, and as we have seen, occasionally harrowing, charity labour was by no means confined exclusively to the preparation of the soil. Harvesting could, on occasion, be undertaken by neighbours without payment, although this practice appears to have been much less widespread than was the case with the earliest stages of the production process. Throughout the period covered by this study, hired labour was preferred for harvesting rather than reliance being placed upon either the goodwill of neighbours or the use of reciprocal arrangements<sup>116</sup>. Certainly, the tradition of providing a large scale community work gathering for a new-come tenant did not extend to the harvest period. Opinion amongst my informants is divided as to why this should have been<sup>117</sup>. Some suggest that the harvest time was so pressured and critical to the survival of each unit, that nobody could afford to worry about what others were doing - they had their work cut out getting their own harvest safely in. While this viewpoint certainly seems convincing, others have suggested that the opposite was in fact the case. The most critical period in the seasonal cycle of production, this argument asserts, is not so much the harvest, but the first stages of ground preparation. Ploughing in particular had to be carried out during an optimum period to avoid problems of frosting and even with the necessary physical resources, a newly-arrived tenant would often have too much ground preparation to carry out and simply would not have had the time without outside help. This latter approach therefore serves to explain why lovedarg help *was* given for ploughing, as

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<sup>116</sup> Stephen (1889) for instance, makes specific reference to the use of non-paid neighbour help for sheep clippings and ploughing, but makes no mention of it when advising on labour needs at harvest time.

<sup>117</sup> Much of this discussion took place amongst a well-informed audience following a paper I gave at a Society for Northern Studies conference in Blair Atholl on May 17th 1997, and so unfortunately it is not recorded on audio tape.



opposed to why it was *not* given for harvesting. This is of interest if we accept the ideas of Philip Abrams who insists that the concept of neighbouring in any form must not be dismissed as 'natural' without attempting to explain its existence.

Oral evidence does however suggest that some farmers and workers were prepared to help out neighbours in need during the harvest period, although I have not traced any large gatherings having been arranged for this; it was more a case of an individual or two helping a neighbour on a casual and 'spur of the moment' basis:

At Millhills where I was afore I came here - we had a tenant farmer and he didnae have much labour - he'd just one man - an when we were cutting the hay at night I'd say to the boys - we'd two tractors an mowers going - "take a cup o tea with you an have it at five o'clock, an after yer tea on the road home go into Mr Kirkland an gie him a couple o hours at his." It was just that sort o help you see. My boss didnae know anything about it cause he was never at home but it was just tae help Mr Kirkwood. If I'd seen him stuck at anything I'd maybe just go. (Dave West SA 1998.21)

Dave West was here referring to a period when he was manager of the home farm of a small estate in Strathearn. While Mr Kirkwood operated a different farm unit, he was a tenant of the same estate, and so it could reasonably be expected that a particularly close relationship would emerge between the two in such circumstances. However, this was not necessarily sanctioned by the estate owner and so this particular example operated at a personal level: Dave recognised a situation where help was required and took it upon himself to provide it. His comment that he would probably go if he saw him 'stuck at anything' suggests that this was not an isolated instance, but was in fact an ongoing principle.

Dave West also recalls help being given to a neighbouring farmer in the Bankfoot area during the 1930s in order to finish off the sugar beet harvest.

Merchants bought the beet from the farmers and transported it to a plant in Cupar, Fife, in order to be processed. The nature of the refining process required the beet to be as fresh as possible, but also free from excess soil, and so for the farmer the beet harvest was extremely labour intensive and had to be completed very quickly:

Away back in the thirties - I was single - and I was up the road here working, an there was a man up there, a small farmer, he'd a field o sugar beet. An on the Saturday afternoon they came and asked some o us if we'd come and clean the beet. And on the Monday morning there was three horses and carts off the farm I was on, an off her father's farm there's two, two horse and carts and two men, and on their own place there were two horse and carts driving the beet down to the station here. ... At that time if you grew sugar beet you only got a certain time tae load yer waggons. Whenever they sent you notice that you could load two wagons, they'd to be ready for the next day... So this was us helpin out this farmer. (ibid.)

This example differs from all those previously cited in that the recipient of the labour requested help rather than waiting for it to be offered. Anne O'Dowd (1981) shows that such a pro-active approach on the part of the recipient was by no means uncommon in Ireland, but most of the Perthshire evidence reveals a greater degree of reticence to have been demonstrated. The lovedarg tradition largely revolved around the concept of an *offer* of help as opposed to a *request* for it. In the case of the sugar beet harvest, however, logistics demanded that this unwritten rule be broken, for neighbouring farmers could not have known that a request for the beet had been received from the merchants and therefore could not have been expected to offer help when it was required.

It may seem that this situation would have been better suited to the use of a form of exchange labour as opposed to charity labour. Indeed, this does belong to that grey area between these two categories as Dave West agreed that if the helpers on this occasion themselves ever needed help, then the beet grower would certainly have offered his services, although this would have to have been in relation to some other specific task as none of the other units in the immediate

neighbourhood grew sugar beet. However, no direct reciprocation took place, and no mental note of 'hours due' seems to have been kept. Such cases add strength to Sahlins' idea of the existence of a continuum of reciprocity as opposed to a dichotomy involving only exchange and charity labour. This particular instance would most likely constitute an example of Sahlins' *generalised reciprocity* category in which 'A extends help to B without thought of reciprocation of equal value (but with the understanding that the fact of having extended help gives the right to receive help on a later occasion)' (Sahlins 1974), although it is unclear here to what extent Dave West and the other helpers would have viewed themselves as having 'the right' to receive help from the beet farmer in the future.

One oral source relating to Perthshire uses the term *lovedarg* to refer to the use of communal charity labour in order to build a house. Here, researcher Anne Ross is speaking to William Forbes of Aberfeldy (SA 1964.18):

AR: And if somebody was sick did they help with the work that they'd got behind with?

WF: They certainly did.

AR: And did they have a name for that?

WF: Yes, it was called a lovedarg.

AR: A lovedarg?

WF: Yes.

AR: And did this ever extend to things like building houses or carting peats?

WF: Yes, it certainly did.

AR: And tell me about the house you used to have, was that built in that way?

WF: I'm led to understand that it was built by lovedarg for a young couple that was getting married.

AR: That would be unusual to have a whole house....

WF: Oh yes.

Another source from the county demonstrates that this practice had been known during the eighteenth century:

It seems strange how of old gentlemen's houses and public buildings could be supplied with bulky materials. In our father's time, however, good neighbourhood abundantly compensated the want of carts. It was then the general practice for all the gentry within a number of miles to give a person who was building a new house what was called a *rake* of their whole tenants' horses, with lime, wood, slates, or whatever material was nearest them. This continued to be given of goodwill for ten or twelve years after the Jurisdiction Act had taken away the exaction of services at pleasure. In this way, no doubt, the trouble and expense of building had been very much lightened of old. At length, however, the goodness of roads, and the facility of hiring carts, joined to a change in views and manners, put an end to this friendly custom (J Ramsay Ochertyre Ms, 1888 Vol II: 221)<sup>118</sup>

It is clearly stated here that this was a custom which operated within the top sector of local rural society: while it was the tenants who were providing the equipment and presumably carrying out the work, it was their landowners who were apparently instructing them to do this. Furthermore, the houses being built were those of 'gentlemen' rather than tenants or indeed of anyone even lower down the eighteenth century Perthshire social hierarchy. It is unclear whether or not the tenants were being recompensed in any way for their efforts, and whether the 'goodwill' was being shown by them or by the gentry. The implication seems to be that at one time this labour would have been expected of them as part of their rental agreements but that they were continuing to carry this out in a similar way to the annual ploughing arrangement on Sir Thomas Munro's Lindertis estate.

No other examples of this have come to light from Perthshire, but it does appear that communal labour was indeed frequently utilised within the vernacular building tradition of pre-improvement Scotland in general, and amongst the lower social orders in particular. Thomas Pennant, writing in the final third of the

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<sup>118</sup> The volume was edited by A Allardyce and published in 1888, but the author of the Ochertyre Ms. John Ramsay, wrote it mainly during the second half of the eighteenth century. It is assumed that the Act which Ramsay refers to here is the 1748 Act which abolished heritable jurisdiction.



eighteenth century described the general custom of the use of neighbour help for house building:

When a man is going to build a house he prepares materials and all his neighbours come to help and the house is built in a day. (Pennant 1772: 87)

However, a more detailed account of this practice is included in the OSA report for Dornock parish in Dumfriesshire:

The farm houses, in general, and all the cottages are built of mud or clay; yet these houses when plaistered and properly finished (as many of them are) are exceedingly warm and comfortable. The manner of erecting them is singular. In the first place they dig out the foundations of the house and lay a row or two of stones, then they procure, from a pit contiguous, as much clay or brick-earth as is sufficient to form the walls; and having provided a quantity of straw, or other litter to mix with the clay, upon a day appointed, the whole neighbourhood, male and female, to the number of twenty or thirty, assemble, each with a dung fork, a spade or some other instrument. Some fall to the working the clay or the mud, by mixing it with straw; others carry the materials; the four or six of the most experienced hands build and take care of the walls. In this manner the walls of the house are finished in a few hours; after which they retire to a good dinner and plenty of drink, which is provided for them, where they have music and a dance, with which, and other marks of festivity, they conclude the evening. This is called a *daubing*; and in this manner they make a frolic of what would otherwise be a very dirty and disagreeable job. (OSA Vol II: 22-3)

The use of clay in the construction of housing was also very common in certain areas of Perthshire, particularly in Errol in the Carse of Gowrie where several magnificent examples of substantial clay dwellings remain intact to this day. Unfortunately no equivalent detailed accounts of their construction have been found, and so we can only surmise that a practice similar to the Dumfriesshire communal *daubing* may have existed there too.

### **Charity Labour - Closing Remarks**

The lovedarg was a multi-faceted institution which operated at all levels of Perthshire rural society and served a variety of functions up until the early years



of the twentieth century. In line with the central tenets of the Scottish poor law, it helped to prevent an accumulation of the kind of production-related problems that could so easily result in family hardship and acute poverty, while also serving to extend the hand of friendship to newcomers (although only at the social levels of small tenants and above). Clearly, the lovedarg could also serve as a token of respect or gratitude to an individual whose contribution to local community life was deemed exceptional. Yet the tradition also served to maintain and crystalise class hierarchies through its recontextualisation as a status symbol, this status being derived from and measured by the numbers of participants attending. And perhaps most significantly of all, the lovedarg, along with all the manifestations of exchange labour highlighted in Chapter Four, contributed significantly to a sense of localised identity and neighbourhood belonging. These factors will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER SIX

### COMMUNAL LABOUR: CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

The ethnography set out in the previous two chapters demonstrates that both exchange and charity labour arrangements were a common feature of post-improvement life in rural Perthshire. This chapter seeks to present an analytical discussion of this material by placing the Perthshire situation within its wider national and international context, as far as available existing sources allow.

As has been pointed out above, the theme of mutual aid has received little detailed scholarly attention within a Scottish, or indeed a British framework. Those writers who do make passing reference to its existence, often appear to imply that such actions were almost axiomatic in rural areas - that somehow such a concept was *natural* and therefore requires no explanation. As Abrams insists, though (Bulmer 1986), such an attitude is rather dangerous in academic terms, for as the raging Huxley / Kropotkin debate illustrates, such an assumption invokes arguments which take us straight to the hub of the human spirit, and either position is always open to challenge. Perhaps of more immediate concern, however, is the fact that the 'axiom trap' has resulted in our home-based academics having failed to place the communal labour phenomenon under the microscope, and as such, a tradition which I would argue lies at the very heart of community social organisation has not been subjected to the academic rigours which it deserves. However, enough material does exist in printed form to make it a worthwhile exercise to at least attempt to place the Perthshire evidence into a wider geographical and indeed theoretical framework.

The work of Peter Mewett provides a useful starting point. His participant-observation study in 1974-5 within a Lewis crofting township he calls 'Clachan'

leads him to conclude that neighbouring, along with the church and kinship, was a phenomenon which was of central importance to interpersonal relations within the township and was therefore a vital building block in the foundation of local social organisation structures (Mewett 1982). Indeed the church, kinship and neighbouring were all closely interlinked, each shaping the patterns of the others in turn. Clachan was extremely close-knit in terms of kinship: of those from the township who married in Lewis between 1855 and 1974, ninety per cent took their partner from within a five-mile radius of the community. The result of this was that nearly everyone had blood relatives living nearby who could be called upon should they need help with their work:

A relative may help with the shearing of sheep, peat cutting and transportation, planting or lifting potatoes and other day-to-day mundane tasks. Help of this nature is especially noticeable when ill-health, incapacity or old age reduces the effective household labour force. (ibid.: 106)

An analysis of one work group revealed that eleven of the twelve households making up the team were related in some way, although most also happened to be neighbours. This situation distorts our picture somewhat, for it is unclear whether they worked together because they were kin or because their homes were geographically contiguous. Circumstantial evidence points towards the latter, though, for in general in Clachan neighbours were frequently found to cooperate for certain tasks, notably potato planting and the leading in of the peats. Clachan was divided nominally into 'neighbourhoods', each containing around ten households whose members formed cooperative work parties. Some of the members may indeed have been related, but the system was based primarily on geography for practical reasons, as it made communications easy and kept travel time to a minimum when communal work was required. Mewett recognises that logistics demanded that the work groups be organised in this way, but he is not satisfied with such a purely utilitarian explanation. This spatially centred organisation, he argues, encouraged social interaction amongst members of the community who would not normally spend time in each other's

company because they did not share common links within the context of either of the other two influential markers he identifies - the church and kinship:

This means that people divided by the schisms of the other associational categories are brought together by the obligations of neighbouring. (ibid.: 111)

The church was influential in the lives of the people of Clachan whether they attended or not, as individuals were categorised and ascribed status by others according to their religious *habits* (rather than beliefs *per se*). Communicant and drunkard represented either pole of the continuum of local lifestyles, and people would thus choose those with whom they wished to associate accordingly. Kinship ties might help to bridge such social gaps where they existed, but the rights and obligations associated with the neighbouring tradition provided another essential focal point for the encouragement of social harmony.

The link between kinship and mutual cooperation has been noted by several other ethnographers who have touched on this aspect of the informal economy within their case studies. Arensberg's account of life in Luogh, a small rural township in County Clare in the West of Ireland, reveals that in the 1930s the communal labour principle remained very strong there and that kinship undoubtedly influenced the make-up of the teams:

... in every case an extended family relationship was involved. ... Carey, who mowed for Denis and Seumas Moloney and for Brian MacMahon, was second cousin to each of them. Peter Barrett was first cousin and uncle respectively to the two farmers whose meadows he mowed. The 'boys' who worked Carey's and Barrett's meadows were also relatives; they were sons of the kinsmen for whom Carey and Barrett had mowed. (Arensberg 1950: 66)

When asked to explain this, these workers told Arensberg that they had 'the right' to receive help from these relatives ('tà còr orm' - 'I have the right') but also had a corresponding obligation to reciprocate. Kinship was an important cultural marker in Luogh society, and it was this, rather than geographical proximity, that was most influential in the mutual aid tradition.

In Wales too, Rees discovered kinship to be an important principle in non-paid labour recruitment:

At shearing times, too, when neighbours cooperate, distant kin are called in to help and to maintain their ties with the household and the community. (Rees 1950, quoted in Frankenberg 1966: 50)

In this case, however, kinship was secondary to geography in the work team constituency, and while kin of the host may well be present, his neighbours made up the majority:

Each farm is the centre of a circle of cooperators which differs slightly from those of its neighbours while overlapping them and in this way the whole countryside is covered by a continuous network of reciprocities. (Rees 1950: 94)

As is demonstrated in the survey work of both Erasmus (1956) and Moore (1975) most anthropological literature dealing with communal labour systems points to the central role played by kinship. This was not the case in Perthshire, however. In a handful of cases, drawn both from fieldwork and my own experience, family members living on separate agricultural units (or indeed not normally involved in farming at all) would indeed help their kin for certain tasks, but in these cases they either also happened to live close to one another, or else they formed only part of the team, with neighbours making up the majority. Jack Myles' father and uncle, for instance (SA 1998.20) helped one another a great deal with a variety of tasks, but they worked neighbouring farms. For tasks requiring a larger labour force, they exchanged with other neighbours who were not related. I also remember when I was very young going with my father, mother and elder brother to help at the potato harvest on an aunt and uncle's farm. We were part of a larger force, most of whom I suspect were being paid, but being family, no money was expected, although we were probably more than recompensed with free potatoes for the following year.

Such minor instances may well have been common within Perthshire, but based on the research outlined in the chapters above, we must conclude that as a rule,



mutual help of this kind was based upon the principle of neighbourhood rather than kinship.

### **Lovedarg versus *Dugnad***

Perhaps the most striking parallel with the Perthshire patterns of post-improvement communal labour can be found in the Norwegian tradition of the *dugnad*, for there too kinship played only a minor role and it was the spatial relationships which took precedent. The *dugnad* involved 'work done by neighbours which [was] performed at the same time by a collective neighbourhood in the interests of one man or farm' (Norddølum 1980: 103) and was called in extraordinary situations to perform specific 'well-defined' tasks. In form and function, the *dugnad* appears to have been almost identical to the Perthshire lovedarg:

An important feature of the assistance was that it was carried out without thought of a direct or equivalent return effort or payment. The only reward one could count on was the food and drink which were usually served, and which more often than not were characterised by festivity. But even the food was not considered as payment according to our way of thinking. The *dugnad* more often than not was considered to be a neighbourly obligation and the individual could not act as if he were in a market situation with calculations of costs and gains as the basis for his actions. (ibid.: 104)

The word '*dugnad*' in the above passage could be substituted by '*lovedarg*' and these assertions would remain totally valid. Norddølum sees the *dugnad* as a form of 'social security' - a safety net for all members of the community should help ever be required. The system therefore did involve a form of reciprocity, but not a direct form, as some members may well have given help to many others during a lifetime without ever actually having been in need to receive help themselves. The reciprocity was therefore obscured, but from a diachronic perspective it certainly existed: as Norddølum remarks, 'the conditions of reciprocity encompassed generations.' (ibid.: 104) In Sahlins' terms, this would clearly constitute a form of 'generalised reciprocity'. Again, all this was equally

true of the lovedarg tradition, or at least certain forms of it, for it acted primarily as a mutual insurance policy where labour was both the dividend and the payout.

Where the two parallel traditions diverged was in the specific nature of the tasks involved, for in Norway roofing dugnads, hay-mowing dugnads, and carding dugnads were all commonly undertaken, but the most important was said to be the driving dugnads, at which different forms of work requiring horse transportation were carried out. Communal gatherings for ploughing - the usual form of the lovedarg - were known, but appear to have been relatively rare due to the pastoral emphasis of production. That apart, the similarities are striking.

As we have seen in relation to the lovedarg in Perthshire, the dugnad institution was not uniform throughout Norway, but tended to be adjusted to local needs according to both economic and ecological factors. For instance, the concept of the 'large-dugnad' can be seen as a variant which was viewed by the participants in different terms to the ordinary gatherings, for as well as being larger in scale, they often involved non-agricultural activities and were hosted by the more well-to-do members of the community. Furthermore, the locals were often joined by workers from outwith the immediate neighbourhood, attracted both by the food and drink but also the chance to meet up with old friends with whom regular social contact was impractical. This description is very reminiscent of those lovedargs which were reported in the local Perthshire press during the mid nineteenth century, although in those cases it was an agricultural task, normally ploughing, which was being undertaken. An attempt to explain this variant is made below.

As well as this social variation, regional variety could be seen in the dugnad tradition, for in the peasant-oriented regions such as Valdres in the south of the country, it was considered the central linchpin of rural micro-economics, and its rules were rigidly observed as a consequence:

First of all, the dugnad was considered to be a neighborly obligation, and he who 'shirked his duty' was labelled a bad neighbour. The violation of this neighborly obligation could in the worst instance be punished by others not assembling when this person needed dugnad-assistance. (ibid.: 105)

In some of the plains areas of the country, however, where farming operated within a more capitalist-centred economic system and where the units tended to be larger, the dugnad was considered less important, and indeed by 1980 was virtually non-existent within living memory in some of the communities investigated (ibid.: 108). Where nominal dugnads were held, the workers were actually paid, and communities lacked the social infrastructure, etiquette and rules which allowed work parties to be formed quickly and efficiently according to a common template of understanding. In other plains regions, notably Hadeland, the dugnad was still known in the middle years of the twentieth century, but it was used very sparingly and only in cases of illness and accidents. For more common and foreseen tasks requiring extra labour, workers were brought in on a paid basis.

Norddølum concludes that the principle of reciprocity was closely tied to the nature of the local economy, and that the dugnad was of greater importance to peasant farmers operating more or less at subsistence level, and of reduced significance to those who were working within an ecologically favourable environment embracing the market-led economy. The latter tended to run larger farms with sufficient regular workers who were able to cope with most tasks among themselves with little need for outside help.

These findings appear logical, and are certainly congruent with the conclusions of most anthropologists who have illustrated that communal labour systems are primarily a feature of peasant societies, and that they tend to reduce in importance as these societies evolve towards a market-led economy.<sup>119</sup> In

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<sup>119</sup> This point is stressed by both Erasmus (1956) and Moore (1975)

Norway, however, (and as I argue below, in Perthshire) things were not quite as straight forward as that. Another investigator of the dognad, Asbjørn Klepp, builds on the work of Norddølum, but reaches slightly different conclusions. While agreeing that the dognad tradition was more marked in the regions typified by subsistence production, Klepp focuses his attention on the Gauldal area which comprises both capitalist and peasant systems, and finds surprising results:

... the relatively richer and more market-oriented lower communities of the Gauldal have had a more firmly regulated obligation to attend a dognad than the upper communities, with their stronger character of a subsistence economy. (Klepp 1982: 85)

How is this to be explained?

The first point to note here is that in the lower areas it was the rules governing the obligation to attend which were noticeably stricter than in the higher areas, not the size or frequency of the gatherings themselves. Thus, in the low communities, it was stipulated that one adult should attend from each household that was notified, whereas further up, the organisation was less rigid: a unit might send one worker, but might just as well send two or three depending on their own needs and schedules at the time. Thus, it is not the case that the dognad was considered more important in the lower regions, simply that it was more rigidly organised. Klepp concludes that the upper Gauldal thus operated the dognad as a form of generalised reciprocity (as there was little or no 'measurement' of hours worked in the short term) while in the lower parts of the region the reciprocity was balanced, where great care was taken to ensure that all members gave and received the same amount of work. Viewed within this context, what initially appears as an anomaly begins to fit into Norddølum's framework, for the more capitalist enterprises where the 'time is money' concept ruled, reflected this in their use of exchange labour arrangements. If they did continue to work with their neighbours rather than rely solely on their own workforce, they had to make sure that any arrangements made immediate

economic sense. If they did not, then the dognad was a hindrance rather than a help.

Klepp uses this evidence as the basis of his hypothesis that as a community moves from subsistence to a market-led economic emphasis and infrastructure, then the form of reciprocity engaged in by its members will demonstrate a parallel shift from the general to the balanced pole (*ibid.*: 93). The Perthshire evidence provides a useful testing ground for this.

Much has been made in Scotland of the existence of the peasant / capitalist farming dichotomy which has emerged as a consequence of the Improvements. Toynbee and Jamieson (1989), for example, make this distinction in their study of responses to economic change amongst farming and crofting families in Scotland during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Those working crofts and 'family farms' are said to have operated at a peasant level of production where all members of the household were involved in gaining the means of subsistence, while the remainder of the farming population followed a capitalist mode of production employing workers from outwith the household on a permanent basis. Interviews with representatives of these different lifestyle modes reveal that inter-household relations tended to be much stronger within the 'peasant' population. Kin and neighbours would help one another for such tasks as house building and the cutting and stacking of peats for fuel, and much bartering of goods and produce took place between households. These mutual relationships were found to be particularly strong within crofting communities and played a reduced, although still significant role within areas dominated by family farming units.

This binary model of peasant versus capitalist production is also the central theme of Carter's (1979) study of the north-east, an area which through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries comprised both large, very commercially



oriented units with rigidly-structured, hierarchical workforces, and small family-run 'crofts'<sup>120</sup> or smallholdings where the occupiers continued to operate at a fairly basic subsistence level of production. The peasant way of life was doomed, however, for as Carter's choice of title for his final chapter - *Death of a Peasantry* - makes clear, the capitalist mode was to become dominant, changing basic lifestyle approaches for thousands of people from World War One onwards.

This pre-1914 very varied pattern of production emphasis also applied to post-improvement Perthshire, but I would argue that there, the 'subsistence versus capitalist' relationship should be seen as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Some units were *more* market-led than others but a clear-cut division between two modes of production did not exist in purely black and white terms: the picture is instead dominated by many shades of grey. In the large-scale farming *carse* areas, for instance, capitalist farmers certainly proliferated but many of their staff were given pendicles to cultivate for their own profit and household support, worked as we have seen by family and to a certain extent by neighbour exchange. At the micro level, then, even these rich arable regions involved a strong subsistence element in their localised infrastructure, a fact which was strongly reflected in the attitudes of the workers. In the *haugh* regions of the county, 'business' farms and smallholdings were juxtaposed quite commonly while in the hill regions crofters operating at family-support level would often have access to certain advantages which came with being tenants of a large and well-run sporting estate where commercial concerns were very much to the fore.

All this adds up to a situation which was too varied and complex to be forced into a model of peasant / capitalist duality. Rather these should be treated as

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<sup>120</sup> In common with Perthshire, the North-East of Scotland contained a form of crofting, although none of these counties were included in official crofting legislation and as such were not free to enjoy the advantages which official crofting status has brought over the last century.

ideal poles, with most Perthshire farms being placed somewhere upon the connecting continuum.

### **Perthshire Communal Labour Revisited**

Set within this framework then, what are we to make of the communal labouring tradition of Perthshire? In what ways can it bring us closer to an adequate understanding of community social organisation and to individual and group attitudes towards such concepts as tradition and modernity? What can it tell us about social hierarchies, group dynamics and mutual protection? How can it help us to understand what made rural Perthshire 'tick'?

For the earlier presentation of the ethnography relating to this theme, communal labour was divided into two sub-sets - exchange labour and charity labour - in order to facilitate the organisation of the empirical material. At this stage, it is useful to dissolve this categorisation in order to re-assess the evidence from a fresh perspective.

#### *The Functional Perspective*

First and foremost, communal labour in all its manifestations was performed in Perthshire because it was found to be useful - it brought practical benefits to those involved. It made tasks quicker, easier, and in some cases, possible to perform while obviating the need for units to hire in extra paid labour. It was thus particularly attractive to those farmers who operated more towards the subsistence end of the production spectrum, where cash to pay for hired workers was in short supply, although it was also utilised to some degree by those involved in highly commercial enterprises. Thus, for labour intensive tasks, especially in the absence of technologically-advanced implementation, mutual aid was in some ways the ideal solution. However, its advantages always had to be weighed against the inherent problems associated with such arrangements.

Farmers could not afford to neglect their own work in any way: at harvest time for instance grain crops had to be brought in at just the right time and so the use of large neighbouring circles of the kind mobilised for sheep clippings would have been completely impractical. By the time those at the end of the rota were reached the crop may well have been ruined. Thus we find few instances of neighbour help being utilised *as a matter of course* for this task within the ethnographic evidence, although this did not preclude neighbours from helping others out once they had their own crop safely secured.

The use of communal labour amongst neighbours continued for as long as those involved considered it to be useful. Once this came to be questioned, the tradition began to go into decline. We can identify two distinct but linked agents in this process - technology and money. On the whole, as technology increased in use and sophistication, the intensity of human labour requirements decreased and units found that they were able to complete more tasks internally. Thus the tractor era of the second two thirds of the twentieth century has witnessed a major decline in the use of neighbour help in Perthshire. Combine harvesters, larger ploughs, electric sheep clippers, off-road 'all-terrain' vehicles as well as tractors themselves are just a few of the specific technological advances which have played a major role in the removal of the need for communal labour gatherings to be called. One interesting exception to this was the introduction in the nineteenth century of the steam threshing mills, for this was one case where technological innovation *created* a need for neighbours to cooperate as opposed to obviating it. Previously, grain threshing with the flail was a task which was carried out in the barn by individuals or small groups whenever spare moments were found, or indeed on larger farms, it was the responsibility of a worker specially employed for this purpose. The travelling mills changed the patterns of threshing to include the 'big thrash' once or twice a year, and as we have seen this necessitated a workforce of at least fourteen, requiring units to find outside help.

'Money' has also been identified as having been influential in the decline of the Perthshire neighbouring tradition. Contemporary farming has to be approached from a 'business' point of view - full integration into a pan-European macro economic framework has forced Perthshire's farmers to embrace the culture of long-term financial investment, taxation-sensitive accounting, E.C. grants, set-aside (where farmers are paid *not* to grow something), full registration and monitoring of stock from birth to slaughterhouse, and a host of other related bureaucratic procedures which make it impossible to approach agricultural production from anything other than a capitalist stance. Profit generation (or in some cases minimisation of loss) is a prerequisite for survival, as in any business. To many of my older informants, all this is summed up in the simple term 'money'. To them it is money that has brought the tidal shift in attitudes and approaches which has rendered community aid a thing of the past.

I would thus argue that this Perthshire case study lends support to Klepp's hypothesis outlined above, as it seems clear that in general, communal labour arrangements have reduced in frequency and importance as communities have moved more towards the capitalist end of the production continuum. It was evident earlier this century when exchange labour was utilised frequently by small farmers in the haugh and hill regions, and only for specific tasks on the larger units of the carse lands. It has also been apparent in more recent years, indeed during the current decade, as clipping circles have disintegrated through increased use of hired squad labour and set against a background of increasing diversification away from agricultural production towards new ventures aimed primarily at capturing a share in the tourist market. Set against this background, individuals have been increasingly challenging the sense of the neighbouring tradition and testing the nature of the reciprocities involved. Where these have been found to be imbalanced or negative, or even perhaps generalised (i.e. relevant only in the longer term), then often they have been abandoned. This, then, serves to corroborate Klepp's findings outlined above, for few individuals

remain content to invest their time and effort in neighbourhood traditions which bring few *immediate* benefits.

Indeed, the concept of *tradition* requires close consideration in this context. The term has been used several times in this study to refer to ongoing neighbouring relationships found within Perthshire, but Abrams' thinking (Bulmer 1986) gives cause to challenge the validity of this, in that to him, it represents only one of several bases of active informal help between neighbours: altruism, status and reciprocity constitute the other possibilities.<sup>121</sup> This framework has been created from empirical studies of urban contexts, but it may be of interest to consider its usefulness in the present attempts to make sense of the ethnographic material from rural Perthshire.

Abrams' understanding of tradition in this sphere relates to 'taken-for-granted helpfulness' which is instilled in community members from an early age and which survives as an 'unconsidered principle' into adult life. The implication here is that neighbourhood help based on this foundation does not actually have to be fulfilling a useful function - it is 'traditional' and therefore intrinsically valid. Peer and family pressure to 'maintain the tradition' may well be strong, and social mechanisms will be in place to encourage this preservation. While it is doubtful whether any regularly occurring arrangement involving unconsidered principles could accurately be termed a tradition - 'convention' would perhaps be a more appropriate label<sup>122</sup> - there is little doubt that the concept of tradition has figured

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<sup>121</sup> For a reminder of these definitions see The Prologue above.

<sup>122</sup> The nature of 'tradition' has been the focus of much scholarly debate (e.g. Ben-Amos 1984; Glassie 1995; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; MacDonald 1997; Shils 1981). My own concept of tradition could be termed a functional one, in that I see it as involving a process of development and change in order to accommodate the circumstances within which it is set at any given point in time. The 'carrying stream' analogy is useful here: the tradition - the stream - flows forwards and picks up flotsam as it goes, jettisoning some of this on its banks while picking up more on the way. Thus, the detailed make-up of the tradition will change through time, but it remains recognisable as the same organism. When this vitality disappears, however, and the tradition fails to adapt to new contexts, it becomes moribund and lapses into 'convention'. Only then are its principles 'unconsidered' and appear as mere habit.



very strongly in the communal labour phenomenon of Perthshire. It was 'traditional' for instance to neighbour with certain units, irrespective of which individuals happened to be resident there at any given point in time: this was particularly notable within sheep rearing areas of the county. It was traditional, at least until the mid-point of the twentieth century, for the host at most gatherings to provide a bottle of whisky for the workers, and in those cases where more than one unit was worked in a day (as amongst pendiclers) then a variation upon this was worked out and maintained by tradition. Indeed the communal partaking of food was a traditional component which linked all Perthshire manifestations of the communal work gathering, the provision of which was traditionally the women's role. Amongst the sheep farmers of the Highland part of the county, each unit often had a 'traditional' date to host their clipping, or if not a specific date, then at least the order was governed by tradition.

Certain of these examples may have had an element of 'habit' within them, but in general they formed a tradition which arose initially out of practicality and continued only while there was a need for them to do so. Convention, then, was not an integral part of the communal labour equation, but tradition most certainly was.

Turning to one of Abrams' other bases, there is no indication that altruism can be said to have been at the root of many of the examples of communal labour arrangement found to exist in Perthshire, even within the 'charity' category. On the surface level, and in the short term, the lovedarg in particular may well have had the appearance of an altruistic gesture by several members of a community towards one of their number, but viewed diachronically, Abrams' third concept - reciprocity - is of greater importance. The action of helping out a neighbour in need could only have been considered altruistic if the person offering help could not expect to gain anything at all in return as a consequence of his actions. But

the lovedarg tradition was organised in such a way as to ensure that anyone who willingly gave help could fully expect to receive help in the same way should the need ever arise. Even if the need never arose, the system acted as an insurance policy, and as marketing professionals of modern day policies continually remind us, even if no payout is ever required the policy holder has invested wisely and has bought peace of mind. So it was with the lovedarg: there was an implied or hidden reciprocity at work, and the offer of help to someone in need was therefore an investment rather than an altruistic gesture.<sup>123</sup>

This form of investment was a cultural ideal which was implicitly encouraged by Scottish society at the widest level. In his examination of the Scottish Poor Law, R A Cage remarks

Unorganised charity constitutes the bulk of private philanthropy. It included not only the occasional indiscriminate hand-out to a beggar, but also any non-reciprocal exchange among relatives and friends in time of need. (1981: 67)

Cage, then, recognises the fact that this form of casual, localised mutual help arrangement fits into the wider context of poor relief in general, and indeed I believe that it must be viewed within such a framework if the practice is to be correctly understood and its importance fully recognised. We must remember, though, that a distinction should be made between *the poor* and *those in need* in this context. To belong to 'the poor' was to be categorised as a member of a distinct grouping within the local community, officially registered as such and therefore entitled to relief from the local parish fund. The social stigma attached to such people was deep-rooted, and many viewed membership as being highly morally degrading. As Cage points out, some parish poor relief administrators took full advantage of this attitude in order to keep the number of claimants to

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<sup>123</sup> Another argument against the altruistic nature of the lovedarg could be made by invoking Mauss's claim that there is no such thing as a free gift: the giver derives moral status merely by giving while the receiver, by definition, incurs a moral debt (in that it is better to give than to receive). (Mauss 1925)

an absolute minimum, and emphasised their lowly status by making them wear ostentatious badges wherever they went (ibid.: 28).<sup>124</sup>

While provision of relief to the poor through official local institutions (primarily the kirk sessions) was restricted to those who were genuinely existing in a state of extreme poverty, the use of charitable labour acted more as a preventative measure to ensure that those in need would not reach such a state of absolute poverty in the first place. Thus, while charity labour remained entirely voluntary and was never explicitly included in any legislation regarding poor relief in Scotland, the phenomenon was certainly *within the general spirit* of the Scottish Poor Law, which traditionally emphasised the need for family and friends to take responsibility for the well-being of their less fortunate relatives and neighbours. Even after the changes brought about by the Poor Law Amendment Act (Scotland) of 1845 came into effect, emphasis upon the provision of private charity at community and family level remained strong, for the able bodied unemployed were still deprived of any entitlement to relief from the poor fund, and even the impotent poor were expected to exhaust all other sources of help before officially registering as a pauper:

The moral circumstances of all applicants for relief were considered before the granting of an allowance. In all cases the amount of relief granted was not sufficient to provide the sole means of livelihood; great stress was placed upon the charity of friends and relatives. (ibid.: 42)

While Cage certainly recognises the role which was played by private charity in the form of community-based mutual assistance, the examination of this does not form part of his study:

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<sup>124</sup> However, one minister and author of the OSA report for Caputh parish, the Rev. William Innerarity, makes the wearing of a poor badge sound as if it was a privilege rather than a symbol of shame. When talking of poor relief in that parish, he refers to a list of poor drawn up in 1775 which contained the names of 30 people, 'of whom 19 received assistance from the parish funds, and 11 were allowed badges' (OSA Vol XII: 204).

Assistance in small communities was forthcoming without the necessity to form consciously an action group. It is not measurable because of its whimsical nature. (ibid.: 68)

This short quotation raises two points in relation to the present study. Firstly, I would certainly agree that casual, loosely organised assistance was omni-present within rural Perthshire during the period covered within this study, and in retrospect, it is indeed impossible to measure in anything approaching a quantitative sense. This does not mean that the phenomenon should be ignored, however, as the gathering of qualitative data can help us to understand something of the workings of this casual family or neighbourly help, and with careful consideration it is possible to at least gain some idea of the degree of importance of this interaction to those involved. The oral evidence, for instance, reveals that such interaction had great social as well as economic importance within Perthshire, for it helped to create and maintain bonds between members of local communities which, as I argue below, were vital to social cohesion and the construction of local identity. The other point to note in relation to Cage's comments above is that organised action groups *were* of course mobilised within rural Scotland well into this century in order to provide labour on a charitable basis to those in need. The main focus of the ethnography above centres upon these arrangements which, by their very nature, were more 'remarkable' than those of a 'whimsical' form and therefore more likely to be recorded, whether, as already suggested, in local newspaper reports, or indeed in the memories of those taking part.

The practical elements of communal labour gatherings can therefore be seen as one link in the chain of mutual protection which underpinned local society and which was instigated, organised and implemented from 'below' but implicitly sanctioned from 'above'.



### *The Semiotic Perspective*

It is clear from the Perthshire ethnographic evidence that communal labour was a multi-faceted phenomenon, and to examine only the utilitarian or economic function would be to seriously underestimate its complexity. The lovedarg in particular transcended social hierarchies, but fulfilled different roles at different levels and in a variety of differing circumstances. The following section attempts an analysis of the range of *meaning* bestowed upon the lovedarg by various sectors of society and the roles which it fulfilled which went beyond economic functionality.

Most societies evolve ways of honouring certain of their members who are thought to be worthy of special recognition for some reason. In Britain at large the government implements this through official Honours lists; universities use the tradition of Honorary Degrees to bestow awards for achievement upon those thought worthy; employers normally hold some form of celebration to mark the retiral of a long-serving employee who will also usually be presented with a gift, while at local community level any number of ways are found to mark achievement by community members. There is sufficient evidence from Perthshire to suggest that this was one role which was performed there by the lovedarg.

The cases drawn from local press reports in which such members of the community as the minister and the vet were given a day's ploughing by neighbouring farmers appear to indicate that this was a recognised and practised token of recognition within rural Perthshire during the nineteenth century, although it seems to have vanished by the twentieth century, for none of my informants recognised this practice from within their own experience. However, O'Dowd's investigation of the communal labour phenomenon as known in Ireland reveals that a similar tradition of gesture labour existed there. Termed *voluntary labour* by O'Dowd, this took the form of the offering of assistance to



certain 'special' members of the community, notably the priest, the carpenter, the cow doctor, the blacksmith and newcomers to the area (O'Dowd 1981: 85). In these cases, the convention of the workforce could be undertaken either by neighbours, or indeed by the recipient himself, and once invited, individuals considered themselves 'duty bound' to attend:

The two accounts included in this analysis which relate of a *meitheal*<sup>125</sup> working for the priest indicate that the priest arranged the group himself and those invited felt an obligation, through fear or otherwise, to appear on the appointed day. (ibid.: 86)<sup>126</sup>

One of the most common recipients of this form of labour help in Ireland was the blacksmith. In some cases help was given in lieu of payment for smithy work and so falls outwith our normal definitions of communal labour, but this is outweighed by recorded instances of help being given on a voluntary basis (ibid.: 87). It was by no means unusual for the smith to instigate the work help himself, rather than wait for an offer: he would simply mention to his clients that he required help and 'although seemingly informal, an obligation was felt to attend' (ibid.: 88). This is one specific point where the Irish and Perthshire traditions diverge, for I have found only one example from my own collecting in which the recipient requested help outwith a specific reciprocal agreement - this was the Bankfoot sugar beet case as discussed in Chapter Five above. There is no evidence contained in any of the gesture labour reports that help had been requested, although certainly the information derived from newspaper coverage is seldom detailed enough to be able to reach solid conclusions on this point. Also, there are no extant reports of help having been given to a smith within

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<sup>125</sup> The word *meitheal* was one of the most common terms used in Ireland to refer to any form of communal work party and was recorded in 22 of the 32 counties (O'Dowd 1981: 57). It seems to have a wider meaning than the term *lovedarg*, for it referred to reciprocal as well as charitable gatherings, and indeed, was commonly used to refer to any team of people. Other common terms used in relation to communal work practices in Ireland include *boon*, *camp*, *comhar*, *join*, *morrowing*, *neighbouring* and *swap*. For a detailed discussion and distribution of these terms see O'Dowd 1981.

<sup>126</sup> This implied obligatory attendance principle makes the use of the term 'voluntary labour' appear rather inappropriate, and so it has not been adopted in the present study.

Perthshire, although this of course does not mean that it never took place. In Ireland, though, it was very common indeed, and seems to have been a feature of the communal labour phenomenon that was etched on the memories of many of the source informants contacted within the surveys used by O'Dowd. As was the case with requests from the priest, it was seldom that a smith's request would be refused, as the following extracts quoted by O'Dowd clearly illustrate (ibid.: 88):

He only had to say the word and neighbours gathered to do the work.

Whenever the smith called on the farmers to get his crops etc. together, they turned out to a man to do it.

He generally asked help and woe betide you if you were unfortunate enough to refuse.

It was the rule with the old people not to refuse the smith a day's work of a mare, horse or ass. So he got his work in his garden and his bog done for no payment.

It is not at all clear why such a strong obligation was felt by the clients of the smith, for in most cases these were not considered alternatives to payment for services rendered but rather supplements to cash payments. Whether the ancient Celtic pre-occupation with the other-worldly powers of the smith remained strong enough into the twentieth century to account for this tradition is unclear, but whatever the explanation, this was not, it would seem, an advantage also enjoyed by their Perthshire counterparts.

While it is true that the *lovedarg* in Perthshire was based around an offer of help rather than a request, at least one early twentieth century commentator saw a direct link between the *lovedarg* and an older form of begging, termed *thigging* in Scots and *an fhoighe* in Gaelic. In a wide-ranging article entitled *Social Customs of the Gael* Alexander MacDonald heads one of his sections 'Love-darg'. The relevant text is quoted in full below:

Another custom is one concerning which little is known in our time, but which, I think, could be found of considerable interest. It reflects a

peculiar phase of the olden-time world. The Gaelic name of this custom is “An Fhoighe”, which our Celtic philologists translate by the not very dignified word “begging” or “thigging”. In their interpretation of the original term, however, I think they have gone to extremes. The custom in general practice simply amounted to this: when a man was overtaken by circumstances in any way that he could not control, and which rendered his position in social life somewhat hopeless, he appealed to his friends, who never failed to come nobly to his rescue. The manner of procedure could possibly have been improved upon. Instead of remaining at home, the needy one usually took to the road, visiting from house to house: and if he were a bard, or a piper, or a fiddler, he gave freely of his art by way of compensation for such gifts as came to him. It will thus be seen that this custom was not “begging” at all in the true sense, and that we have survivals of it in many forms in our own time.

**The “love-darg” of the present day is substantially the same as the services of kindness in those days rendered to one down in his luck.**

It was in fact a phase of charity that was neither undignified nor aggressive, and it must be remembered that the good people of the days of old made, in most districts, provision, in the shape of a small surplus, for such as might need help from time to time. Grant in “The Gael”, a work published in 1814, says:- ‘It was a custom in the Highlands of Scotland, not as yet unknown, for a young married man to repair with horses in the harvest time to the corn-fields of his countrymen, for the purpose of getting seed-corn to sow his land, and straw to support his cattle for the first year of his occupancy of land. This was called “foigh”, and it is known in the language of the low country still by the word “thigging”, which was a species of beggary, though the usage which from the common want of capital in the tenants or occupiers of land sufficient to enable them to stock their possessions, saved this sort of mendacity from the concomitant disgrace and meanness of common begging’. In other words, as I have shown, it was not begging in the Highlands at all, but a custom which certain circumstances called forth. There was no continuity about it as far as individuals were concerned. It was just a setting up on an occasion’. (MacDonald 1924-5 - my emphasis)

MacDonald, then, attempts to create a clear link between the lovedarg as known at that time (1920s) and ‘an fhoighe’ or thigging. Unfortunately he does not explain precisely what was actually meant by the term lovedarg in his experience, although the suggestion certainly seems to be that it was linked to help procured at the time of marriage or moving into a new tenancy. Certainly, his argument does appear relatively convincing in certain respects. The ‘foigh’ tradition

involved people coming to the aid of friends in need by giving them goods or food, often it seems, to enable them to get by during the first season of their tenancy. However, two principal factors separate this practice from the *lovedarg*: help was requested as opposed to being offered, and the form of help given was in goods rather than services. Perhaps these points of departure should not be over-emphasised however, for I believe that MacDonald was certainly correct in his suggestion that the two concepts were closely related, and were separate manifestations of the overall provision of charity *by* the community *for* the community, performing important roles in the informal economy of the local societies within which they operated.

In Perthshire, the practice of members of a community offering a new tenant a day's ploughing at the first opportunity following their arrival can also be seen partly as a gesture - in this case of welcome - although as was pointed out in the previous chapter, this also brought important practical benefits in many cases. To John Fisher's family in 1914, for instance, it was essential as they had no horses or equipment. However, in several of the press reports of *lovedargs* in nineteenth century Perthshire, it was clear that the economic advantages were secondary, for several individuals who might best be described as minor gentry were given ostentatious welcomes in this way and the circumstantial evidence certainly suggests that they were not actually in *need* of this help. Nonetheless, the gesture held meaning both for those offering the help and for the recipient, whatever the economic background. It may have meant that the workers, or at least their employers who asked them to attend, held the recipient in high regard, if indeed they knew him (or occasionally, her) and it certainly brought status to a farmer to have all the neighbours turn up *en masse* in order to give a free day's work voluntarily. This represents the reverse side of Mauss's (1925) argument that status is derived from *giving*: in this case it seems clear that the status is bestowed upon the receiver, through the fact that so many people are prepared



to turn out in this way to 'honour' the recipient. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the local press almost seemed to 'measure' this status in their reporting. It is useful at this stage to return to the models constructed by Erasmus and by Moore in order to appreciate the international framework within which this particular form of the lovedarg can be viewed. The eye is drawn to their festive labour category, for this phenomenon which has been recorded from at least three continents seems to have been a feature shared by nineteenth century Perthshire too. A large proportion of the conditions which typified festive labour gatherings as studied by social anthropologists also applied to those forms of gesture lovedarg as outlined above. First of all these gatherings were very large when compared to other forms of communal labour within Perthshire; there was no permanent organisation, but rather they were convened *ad hoc*; according to the newspaper accounts, the workers were treated to large amounts of food and drink following the completion of the work and there is no suggestion at all that the host felt any obligation to reciprocate. However, the feature which was most important of all, in that it differentiated this form of the lovedarg from the rest, was that the hosts seems to have been of higher social status and wealth than those actually carrying out the work. This is an aspect of these festive gatherings which ethnographers have identified as being of particular significance. A general principle of mutual aid is that it works best amongst social equals, for only then is the mutual reliance balanced enough to ensure that the arrangement will continue successfully (Erasmus 1956: 463). In the case of festive labour, however, this rule is nearly always broken, and as such, it has been considered as a phenomenon in which those of higher social status are able to take advantage of their neighbours by distorting the tradition to meet their own needs. Was this the case in Perthshire?

Unfortunately, the evidence is too thin to be able to provide a confident answer to this: the press reports do not detail exactly who attended the gathering, and what their relationship was with the host. We cannot tell, for instance, to what



extent the workers attended because they were instructed to do so by their employers, but it would be reasonable to infer that this indeed was often the case. Certainly, they must have had their employers' permission to attend, for a day's labour on another farm was no small gift. It is likely, then, that these lovedargs were essentially an employers' 'club' - organised *by* employers *for* employers - and whether or not the ploughmen wished to attend, they would have been forced to do so under their contractual agreements. In this respect, the relationship was indeed between social equals. However, the workers did not lose from the situation as a day's ploughing required the same effort regardless of where it was carried out, and indeed, they benefited from the lavish spread which was always provided. Thus, there does not appear to have been any exploitation of the workers involved in this arrangement, except, perhaps, within their use as pawns in the status games of their employers.

How this 'élite' lovedarg tradition arose is again a matter of conjecture, but I suggest that two possibilities exist here. As previously stated, the Lindertis 'annual' lovedarg is probably a survival of the labour exaction principle, and this may also be at the roots of the other examples of gesture labour at the local élite farming level. Alternatively, the employers may have witnessed the lovedarg phenomenon as it existed among the smaller tenants and smallholders who were using it on the basis of economic necessity, and gradually 'hijacked' the tradition, recontextualising it according to the principles of *bricolage*<sup>127</sup>, and re-presenting it with new meaning, in this case as a status symbol.

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<sup>127</sup> *Bricolage* is a term coined by the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss to refer to the recontextualisation of existing cultural forms in order to create new forms with new meaning. Although originally used within the specific genre of oral narrative tradition, the term has been borrowed to refer to such a process involving any cultural form. The *bricoleur* (the agent of change) does not borrow the previous form 'wholesale', however, for it must be altered slightly in order to signify the change of meaning. Material culture scholars are among those who have adopted this concept within their studies, and have used it to explain cultural change in such fields as costume and dress. The skinhead movement, for instance, is said to have used *bricolage* in its adaptation of every-day male working class dress - jeans, boots, braces - but the change of style and impression brought about by combining these with shaved heads gives the clothes new meaning, in this case portraying a self-confident and challenging working class as

All this is not to imply, however, that those operating at the lower levels of local society used the *lovedarg* only because of its economic advantages while the higher orders held the monopoly on the semiotics of the tradition. In all its forms and at every level of society, *the lovedarg brought people together*, physically and metaphorically. The same is also of course true of all forms of communal labour addressed within this study. In terms of the creation and maintenance of community identity, the importance of this simple fact cannot be overstated. Human society revolves around such relationships and reciprocities and at the local level people will find different ways of creating the channels for this interaction to take place. Often it is manifested in leisure time: in the rural Perthshire context this would include harvest homes, bothy ceilidhs, dances 'at the crossroads', calendar festivals, weddings and funerals, to name but a few. Communal labour provided another platform for this, but the fact that it belonged to the sphere of work rather than leisure sets it apart somewhat as a special case. Nonetheless, the tradition also helped to unite the worlds of work and leisure, for the evening meals and celebrations which nearly always accompanied these occasions were central to their structure. The communal partaking of food and drink on these occasions should be seen as an essential component of the whole tradition, and as the ethnography above makes clear, it is certainly highlighted as such by those who experienced these gatherings at first hand. Most foodways scholars agree that the sociological implications of food consumption are at least as worthy of study as the biological aspect, although certainly there are varying schools of thought as regards the relative importance of each.<sup>128</sup> The complexities of the structuralist versus materialist argument need

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opposed to a subservient one (see for example Hall and Jefferson 1976). Within the present hypothesis, the farming élite could be said to have taken the *lovedarg* tradition of the lower orders, and changed it through the degree of emphasis upon the provision of food and drink, and then re-presented it as a symbol of their own power and influence.

<sup>128</sup> Sociological and anthropological food theorists can essentially be divided into two main camps, the structuralists and the materialists (also termed developmentalists). The key structuralist contributors, Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, while disagreeing on several secondary points, essentially argue that patterns of food consumption are culturally determined, and therefore stress the process of social conditioning in food choice and consumption milieux.

not detain us here, but I have no doubt of the importance of the communal food consumption on these occasions to the cementing of the bonds created during the day's work. The food and drink represented a celebration - a symbol of shared labour, shared responsibility and shared identity. It celebrated the completion of the task in hand, a gesture of gratitude to those attending and a token of togetherness and belonging.

### **Communal Labour - a Revised Model**

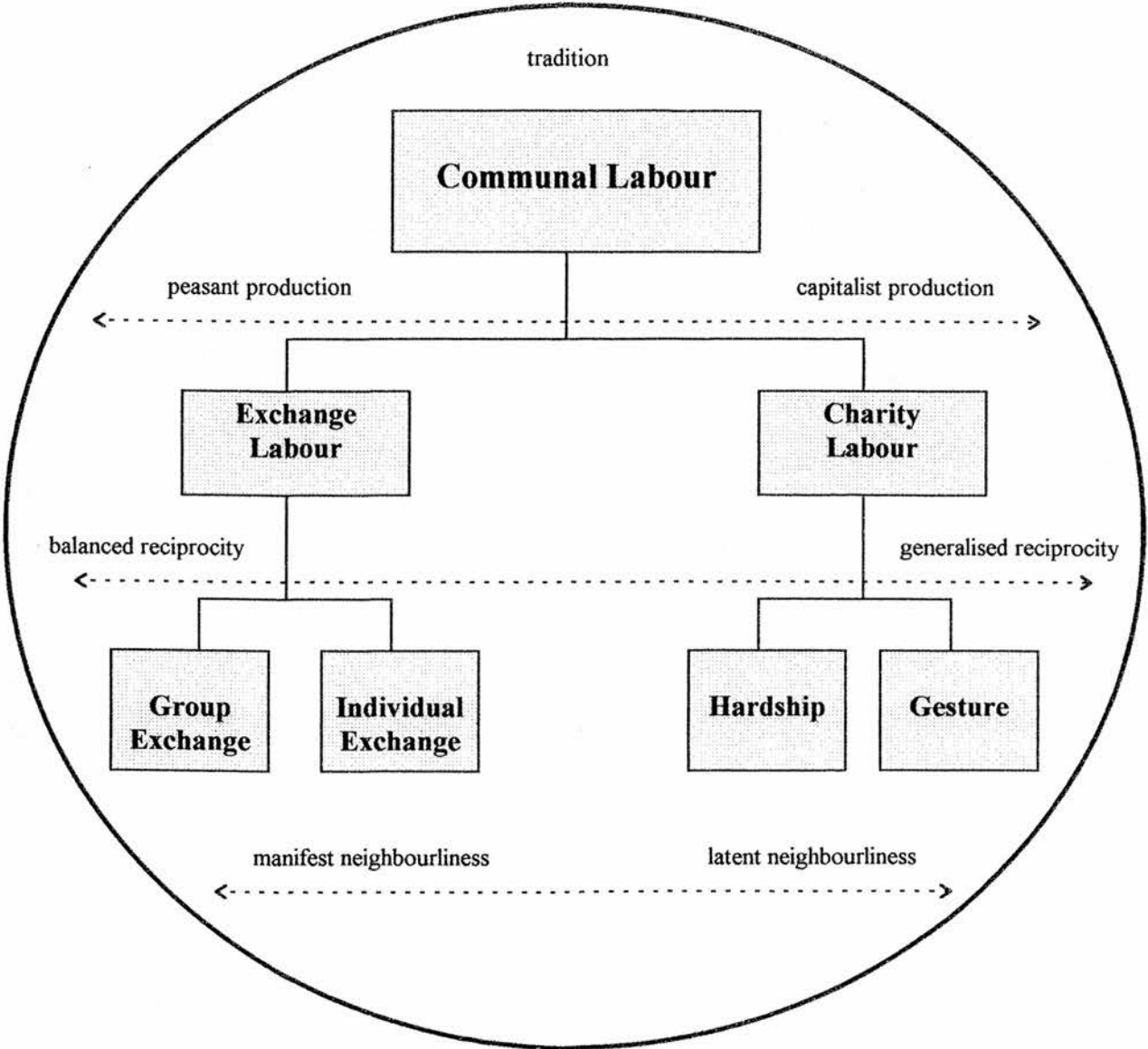
Figure 6.1 represents an attempt at a diagrammatic representation of the communal labour phenomenon as it existed in post-improvement rural Perthshire. It constitutes a synthesis of the ideas discussed in the Prologue to Part B of this thesis but as applied to the empirical evidence gathered during the present research.

All forms of neighbouring as existed in Perthshire were governed to some degree by the concept of tradition, and so this phenomenon cocoons the whole model. Altruism, on the other hand, is seen to be entirely absent. Within this, communal labour is divided into two main subsets - exchange labour and charity labour - although it is recognised that these do not represent a rigid dichotomy, but can also be seen in terms of a balanced and generalised form of reciprocity respectively. Within the exchange category, Moore's differentiation of individual and group exchange has been maintained, for both were common in Perthshire. Where exchange agreements were heavily relied upon, neighbourliness can be said to have been manifest. Exchange labour was of greatest importance to those operating more towards the subsistence end of the production spectrum.

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The materialist school, represented by Marvin Harris, Jack Goody and Stephen Mennell, amongst others, argues that it is nature which takes the lead here, and culture follows on as a result. Both camps obviously recognise the biological necessity of food consumption but offer opposing explanations of the degree to which these physiological laws affect the variations in food culture known throughout the world today. For a detailed analysis of this debate see Wood 1995.

**Figure 6.1**  
*Communal Labour: A Revised Model*



On the charity side of the model, two forms can be identified: work carried out by neighbours on the unit of an individual who was obviously in need for some reason, and work offered to an individual as some form of gesture. Both these sub-categories represent the existence of latent neighbourliness, where neighbours were prepared to act together when the need arose (or when expected to do so), but did not necessarily cooperate on a regular basis. This was the form of communal labour which survived in capitalist-oriented regions even when exchange principles were weak.

Taken together, the communal work and communal feasting were important vehicles for the manifestation of community identity in post-improvement rural Perthshire. Neighbouring did not create a climate of *communitas*, Turner's term for a bonding of people which overrides normal social ordering (Turner 1974), for it is clear that the tradition could be used to solidify existing class hierarchies rather than dissolve them. But with the passing of the communal labour tradition, and in the absence of a substitute channel of inter-household communication emerging to take its place, a vital cog in the machinery of local social cohesion has been lost, and is lamented by many as a result. There is nostalgia in their lament, but this should not be confused with a 'kailyard' sentimentality. The farming folk I know and respect and upon whose experiences I base these observations are a realistic breed and are not given to viewing their past through a rosy lens. This past was not peopled by altruists who have suddenly become poisoned by self interest, as they are very well aware. But they recognise the feeling of belonging when they meet it, and they therefore know when its intensity wanes. And for many, it has. I suggest that where this is the case, it is due at least in part to the disappearance of the communal labour tradition.



## CONCLUSION

When compared to the ethnographic present, working in the ethnographic past offers both advantages and drawbacks. The problems are obvious: it is very hard to observe a society which cannot be viewed directly. I, as an historical ethnographer, do not share the last line of defence against misinterpretation often cited (implicitly) by my anthropological colleagues in that I was not 'there' (Stocking 1983:a). Despite his blatant 'otherness' Malinowski could claim to have experienced direct participation in Trobriand Island life, allowing him to 'grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, and realize his vision of his world' (1922: 25). Albeit in more subjective clothing, the same claims have been made more recently and much nearer home, for participant observation still remains the central research tool of the contemporary ethnographer. Cohen (1987), MacDonald (1997) and Parman (1990), for instance, were all able to immerse themselves in the communities they were studying and despite their status as outsiders, gained enough confidence in their ability to interpret the cultures they witnessed to produce substantial monographs for public consumption.

Having been born in 1966 after the main period covered by this thesis had ended, direct observation of the culture of which I am an indirect product was not possible for me. And yet I was eager to do as the ethnographers do; to write about the everyday, to examine processes and experiences and to find out how these are articulated by participants themselves. I was keen to look at the intricacies of the layers of interdependence within localised structures of social organisation and to try to understand the role played by tradition as well as innovation in shaping rural Perthshire life. I wished to write ethnographically about the past, to treat history as *experience* (Lindqvist 1992), thus steering a course between subjectivity and objectivity. In attempting to achieve this, I have

focused on the written and spoken narratives of those who *were* 'there': an observation of the past through the testimonies of the participants themselves.

In doing so, I would assert that the problems posed by this process are compensated for by certain inherent advantages. Contemporary ethnographers can only really cite one set of experiences - their own. They can provide but one 'version', and as Cohen suggests (1987), as long as it is 'plausible' then that is all that can be expected. But judging levels of plausibility requires some prior knowledge on the part of the reader, and with the exception of the observed themselves, few have the means of acquisition. It is rare for any community to be studied by more than one ethnographer, and so the resulting version is usually the *only* version. To effectively challenge this version requires a whole new study, for the archiving culture has barely touched the world of anthropology. Corroboration is rare, allowing the ethnographer to hide behind a wall of interpretation. Introducing his Whalsay ethnography, Cohen asserts

Most of what is offered should be regarded as interpretation rather than as fact, and any statement for which factual status is inadvertently claimed should be treated with the greatest scepticism. (1987: 3)

I cannot make this claim in relation to the present work, for at times I have felt that an objective stance has been justified and indeed necessary. In Chapter One, my approach has been very much that of the social historian, using 'conventional' documentary sources in order to provide an overview of the process of agricultural change which swept through Perthshire in the second half of the eighteenth century. 'Facts' also feature heavily in chapters Two and Three in an attempt to emphasise the importance and dominance of both child labour and the bothy system to the farming infrastructure of the county. Part B has a legislative context where I argue that communal labour arrangements were a vital link in local informal economies, acting as an insurance policy against disaster and slotting into the framework of community support which lay at the heart of the Scottish poor law.

'The facts' are used here to build the foundations of the text which then goes on to offer subjective observations on the *meanings* of these facts to real lives. But unlike the work of most anthropologists, the 'plausibility' of this presented version can be assessed. Other scholars can consult 'the evidence' - recorded oral testimony and historical documentary narratives - and apply the checks and balances which most disciplines take for granted as forming the basis of academic rigour. There is also a degree of polyvocality here in that the voices of the observed are present. Certainly, I, as narrator, can select which voices to include and therefore exercise a strong degree of control, and as interrogator, I also had a role in shaping their narratives in the first place. But again, the interviews can be accessed and re-assessed at any time and so my findings are more open to challenge than those of Cohen and his anthropologist colleagues. There are few hiding places for the historical ethnographer.

Within this framework, what insights have been achieved as regards the questions and problems posed at the outset of this thesis?

## **Belonging**

As discussed in the Introduction, recent ethnography within rural Scotland has tended to address the concept of belonging in relation to *not* belonging: in order to have an 'us' there has to be a 'them'. Increasing in-migration to the Highlands and Islands over the last two decades has given sharper focus to these issues, although out-migration too has played a central role in shaping perceptions of local identity. Sharon Macdonald uses this discourse, articulated as issues of 'home' and 'away', as the foundation of her examination of local identity and 're-culturation' in Skye (1997). Belonging, she suggests, is tied to 'oppositions', both in terms of the movements and origins of people and of moralities, although a marked flexibility in the use of these differentiations sums up 'the simultaneously closed and open nature of belonging' (ibid.: 159). In common with most of those studied within the 'anthropology at home' movement

(Jackson 1986) MacDonald's chosen community also has the quality of peripherality. Its members express their identity in opposition to 'the core', thought of as 'the mainland' or 'the Lowlands' or at times manifested linguistically, drawing a boundary between those who have (native) Gaelic and English speakers. To Mewett, working in Lewis, the 'associational categories' of kinship, neighbouring and the church form the framework for oppositional belonging (1982), while Cohen (1987) suggests that belonging in Whalsay is structured around symbolism attached to parts (segments within the island) and the whole (the island itself).

The oppositional belonging concept can also be applied to nineteenth and early twentieth century rural Perthshire, but the 'associational categories' and the symbols used to mark them differ substantially from those highlighted in relation to the works discussed above. First of all, it is hard to identify a 'whole'. *Sgitheanach* and *Leodhasach* are meaningful and frequently-used terms of belonging in relation to Skye and Lewis respectively but there is no Perthshire equivalent and no strong sense of 'Perthshire' identity in the narratives collected here. The physical boundaries of the county are arbitrary and intangible and were frequently crossed by those in search of work or better conditions. These boundaries, then, were not *barriers*: being 'from Perthshire' was not often used as a meaningful category of opposition to being from Angus or Fife or Argyll.

Physically, Perthshire as 'whole' has two distinct 'parts', one highland, the other lowland. Scottish ethnography and historiography - indeed, Scottish writing in general - often tends to highlight this dichotomy to such an extent that each is defined almost axiomatically in opposition to the other (Nadel-Klein 1997). If this binary opposition had any real substance, one would surely expect to find some evidence of it at localised levels in those areas where the two 'cultures' meet. And yet in Perthshire, there is little indication that identity and belonging were constructed around this division at all. The linguistic boundary between



Gaelic and English was constantly shifting northwards and westwards within the county during my period of focus, and so language became a problematic peg on which to hang personal or localised identity.<sup>129</sup> Large units such as the Atholl Estates spanned the fault line, thus bringing 'highlanders' and 'lowlanders' together under a common organisational framework. As Leneman shows, the estate management made no distinction between the highland and lowland sectors of their tenantry (1986). When my grandfather, James West, moved his family from Airtully to Grandtully in 1941, they were certainly conscious of the contrast in the terrain, but none of the family members who made this move articulated a sense of difference in those terms. They were not lowlanders on foreign soil. The boundary they passed over was rather one which separated two cultural ecotypes, two *ways*.

### *Cultural Ecotypes*

In Chapter One, reference is made to the methods and theories of the concept of cultural ecology and the possible identification within Scotland of cultural zones or ecotypes using an approach pioneered in Scandinavia. In order to avoid the problems inherent in over-reliance upon the Highland/Lowland dichotomy within Perthshire, three potential ecotype candidates were selected - *carse*, *haugh* and *hill*. These have been used principally as useful terms of reference, a tool to aid the construction and organisation of the thesis and should not be seen as the central issue of investigation in themselves. Had the creation of a cultural ecology model for rural Perthshire been the main intention of this work, then it would have been necessary to include a wider selection of cultural forms within the analysis.

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<sup>129</sup> Linguistic issues have not formed a part of this study and it is recognised that more work is required before more confident assertions can be made on this point.



Nevertheless, certain ‘constellations of core features’ can be traced within the present ethnography which allow for a preliminary cultural ecology model to be suggested. These features are outlined below.

**Table 7.1**

*Carse, Haugh and Hill Core Features*

<b>Carse</b>	<b>Haugh</b>	<b>Hill</b>
Cereal Emphasis	Mixed Cereal / Root Crop / Beef Cattle Emphasis	Sheep / Root Crop Emphasis
Material Culture Innovation	Material Culture Innovations Readily Adopted	Material Culture Lag
Strict Divisions of Labour	Relatively Strict Divisions of Labour	Flexible Divisions of Labour
Rigid Workforce Hierarchy	Rigid Workforce Hierarchy	Variable Emphasis on Workforce Hierarchy
Latent Neighbourliness	Variable Degrees of Neighbourliness	Manifest Neighbourliness
Generalised Reciprocity Dominant	Balanced Reciprocity and Some Generalised Reciprocity	Balanced Reciprocity Dominant
Bothy System Widespread	Bothy System Widespread	Kitchen System Widespread
Farming Alone	Farming Alone	Farming and Game Sport
Spatially Intensive Production	Relatively Spatially Intensive Production	Spatially Extensive Production

This simple model is presented as a tentative cultural ecology outline which has emerged almost as a by-product of the main themes of enquiry followed within this research, and as such should be viewed only as an initial foundation for future investigations of a more focused design. A series of regional comparisons conducted on such a basis would, I suggest, contribute to an improved understanding of Scotland’s farming culture systems, past and present.

And yet this model does bring us closer to an understanding of belonging at localised levels. It consists of cultural categories based upon the nature of the land and the relationships of people to that land and to each other upon that land. To me, the essence of belonging in rural Perthshire was a common attachment to the soil, not in a mythical or romanticised sense, not as an identification with what Kenneth Whyte calls 'The Archaic Context' (1998: 15-34) but certainly in a deep-rooted and highly practical way. This is the one aspect of belonging which is largely absent from recent anthropological discourse within Scotland, perhaps because it appears to produce connotations of superficiality and kailyardism or perhaps because an attachment to the land is taken as an axiom. I feel strongly, though, that it was central to the daily, seasonal and life cycles of the men, women and children of rural Perthshire throughout the post-improvement period (and doubtless long before), only dissolving within my own generation. The manifestations of belonging highlighted below were important, but secondary to this essential link with the soil.

### *Inter-dependency*

The focus on belonging within this thesis has been channelled through an examination of the cultural markers of the farming life mode and in particular the *layers of inter-dependency* which I see as having existed within this society. Attention has been paid to the social mechanisms which have been forged and shaped by tradition in order to facilitate mutual survival and maximise the potential of the available environmental and human resources. These points have been addressed within the cultural contexts of the nuclear family household, the localised farm unit, and the wider rural neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, very little attention has been paid to date to the concept of non-waged labour within Scottish farming communities. This represents a serious omission from the literature, for as the present study reveals, this phenomenon

has been widespread throughout Perthshire during the past two centuries, and its various manifestations have contributed to local society at a number of levels. Furthermore, preliminary circumstantial evidence appears to suggest that Perthshire was by no means unique in this within a Scottish context. Further research is required, however, if the importance and dynamics of this informal rural economy are to be fully assessed and understood. It is hoped that this thesis will provide a base from which such further work can be launched.

Within Perthshire, non-waged labour has been seen to have played significant roles at both household and community levels. Although many of the children who were engaged in farm labour during the nineteenth century were being paid, and thus were contributing to the household economy in monetary terms, families such as 'The Wests' relied on the regular direct labour input of the women and children for economic survival and advancement. No claim is being made that they represent the 'standard' or 'typical' Perthshire farming family, but equally their personal narratives suggest that they did not think of their circumstances as being at all unusual. That the children of smallholder parents worked on the land was an accepted principle: this was certainly true of life at Balnabeggan and indeed upon the neighbouring units which belonged to the Grandtully Estates during the middle years of the twentieth century, but it was no less true of 'The Wests' in their Airntully home because of the pendicle system employed there. From the age of eight or nine, the children had to begin making the transition from burden to asset in household economy terms, and a strict code of internal discipline framed in family tradition ensured that this transition took place successfully. In this respect, the child labour *experience* witnessed more continuity than change during the period of study.

Non-waged labour was witnessed in its most pronounced form, however, at the *inter*-household level of 'the neighbourhood'. Within Part B of this study, the maintenance, development and disintegration of mutual aid systems operating on

both reciprocal and charitable bases have been traced, and subsequent analysis has generated a number of suggestions. The provision of charity labour through the deployment of the *lovedarg* should be seen as an unofficial yet integral part of the Scottish poor relief system, as it provided a stop gap insurance against production failures and subsequent poverty. Operating within the spirit of the poor law, it was organised *by* the neighbourhood *for* the neighbourhood, and indeed, levels of participation in some ways helped to *define* the neighbourhood.

Economic and logistical advantages were also gained in certain circumstances through participation in exchange or reciprocal labour arrangements which obviated the use of monetary transactions. Organised on either an individual or group exchange basis, these unwritten but well-defined agreements operated to the mutual benefit of all of those taking part: once they were seen to be neglecting this principle of balanced reciprocity they were quickly dropped in favour of waged labour arrangements. Nonetheless, they remained in operation for certain tasks throughout the post-improvement period within Perthshire, and were highlighted by many informants in a very positive sense as being representative of a way of life which has now passed.

Closer investigation of the communal labour arrangements which were found to exist in the county reveals that economic necessity was not always at their root. In some cases they operated in different ways and at different levels, acting as a welcome to a new tenant (whether the labour was actually needed or not), as a token of appreciation and as a mark of respect. There is also strong evidence to suggest that the local farming élite utilised the *lovedarg* tradition as a status symbol, re-contextualising its meaning to derive personal rather than community gains. This may have acted as a replacement for the older principle of labour exaction which was commonly written into tack agreements in the pre-improved period and which can be seen to have had a dual function in providing a labour



source for the heritor while simultaneously underlining the power and status of the landed classes over their feudal inferiors.

The communal labour phenomenon can be cited as a leading vehicle for the construction and maintenance of neighbourhood belonging and identity, for it brought people together in both a professional and social environment allowing individual and group relationships to be forged, cemented and reinforced. The fact that these gatherings, whether based on charity or reciprocity, were always rounded off with the communal consumption of food and drink is highly significant in this context, serving to create a direct link between the functional element of the day's work and the social implications of the communal gathering. Informants themselves highlighted these occasions as being important and significant, and lamented their demise - 'now you never - very seldom - you see yer neighbours the same as ye did in those times' (SA 1998.23). With the virtual disappearance of the communal labouring tradition, and in the absence of an alternative vehicle of work-based 'togetherness', one vital link in the chain of neighbourhood spirit and local identity has been lost.

Another symbol which has been chosen within this study as an identity marker - in this case specifically of male farm servants - is the bothy, a choice of focus which has been largely informant-led as this was found to be a constant point of reference for many of those whose personal narratives have been consulted.<sup>130</sup> The creation of the bothy system during the early post-improvement period was symptomatic and indeed symbolic of the growing social gulf between master and servant: the workers were no longer invited to eat at the same table as their employers, but were relegated to the steading across the courtyard next to the

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<sup>130</sup> It should be stressed that the bothy case study has been included because of the special significance which has been attached to this form of housing within the sources, and not as part of a detailed investigation of the material culture of post-improvement Perthshire vernacular architecture. Thus, no comparable study of farmhouse and cottage accommodation has been included within this ethnography.



livestock to live in conditions which attracted external condemnation throughout our period. Yet while the asceticism of bothy life troubled the minds of those in positions of authority, principally the clergy, this was emphasised and used by the servants to their own advantage. In the role of *bricoleurs*<sup>131</sup>, they created for themselves an image of disinterest in the culture of material possession which was growing all around them, leaving them free to adopt a work ethos based on skill, horsemanship and pride which combined to shape the ploughmen into the self-proclaimed professional meritocracy of the rural labouring classes. Those few basic items of material culture which were to be found in the bothy were in themselves utilised as symbols of their spartan living, and as both Adams (1991) and Carter (1979) have pointed out, these were frequently hauled outside to act as self-parodying props when the photographers came round.

Male farm servant identity, then, was forged through the creation of a sub-culture which centred upon the bothy as an icon of worker independence, anti-establishment attitudes and the horseman's pride. In this case, belonging was constructed through opposition, the 'other' being represented by the farmer as employer, but also by authority in general.

### **A Personal Odyssey**

At the outset of this thesis, I stated that this work represents my attempt to document and understand the way of life of those from whom I have come. The passage of time can never allow for a full and comprehensive understanding of the past to be gained, but I do believe that an ethnographical approach based on the voices and words of those people who *are* that past can go a long way towards the achievement of such a goal. On a purely personal note, I now realise that there has been a thread of continuity which has run through the lives of my ancestors for many generations and which has attached them firmly to a cultural

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<sup>131</sup> See footnote 127 above.

tradition founded upon the soil they have worked. With the onset of modernity and the virtual collapse of the Perthshire farming infrastructure, this continuity has been lost within my own generation.

Conducting the research for this work, and indeed undertaking the process of writing at length about this culture, has undoubtedly helped me in my personal search for a sense of belonging. The most 'dog-eared' page of my notes is that which sets out the genealogy of my own family (Figure 2.2), for it has been the desire to connect with these names and the lives they represent which has been the driving force for me throughout. I view this form of autoethnography as a vital step in my professional development as an ethnologist too, and agree wholeheartedly with the recent comments of Beverley Stoeltje on this issue:

... fieldwork in one's own culture familiarizes the researcher with many institutions and social processes present in other societies as well. ... Researchers who have worked first within their own demographic group, then, are less likely to have difficulties seeing similarities between their own culture and other cultures. By looking at one's home culture through the lens of fieldwork, one has in a sense objectified the self and is less apt to objectify the 'other' with the techniques of the ethnographic exotic, oblivious to social processes that characterize one's own culture. (Stoeltje *et al* 1999: 161)

But through the use of *historical* ethnography, my process of familiarisation has begun not with my own culture, but with the parent culture from which my own has grown. Only now do I feel I have both the personal and ethnological grounding from which to move on.

# APPENDIX ONE

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH COMMUNAL LABOUR

### AIRSLEY

Caithness 1916 'An Old Caithness Croft'. *John O'Groats Journal* SND

'Two crofters ploughed their lands together, each supplying a horse: this was called 'airsley'. And is still common practice in some parts of Caithness'.

### ALE-RANT

Aberdeenshire. 1897. J Pirie in *Banffshire Journal*. Ms collection for History of Cairnie Parish (2 Feb) SND

'The ale-rant. It is fifty years or longer since it fell out of use. [It] was got up about Christmas or the New Year for the benefit of some old man or old couple in necessitous circumstances. A large company appeared on the appointed evening to taste the *browst* as it was called. One man measured out the ale in jugs to every one who came forward, and another man was in attendance to receive the money'.

### ASLEY / ASLY

Orkney Jamieson 1825 *Supplement to the Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*

'Horses in Asley are horses belonging to different persons, lent from one to another, till each person's land be ploughed'.

Orkney Marwick 1929 *The Orkney Norn*

'To lay in asly - ie to unite forces or unite one's animals for farm work'.

### ASLIN

Shetland 1908 SND from Jakobson 1908 *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland*.

'De coo or horse is aslin', the cow or horse has two owners, each possessing one half'.

### BOON

'A band of reapers, shearers, turf-cutters, or other workers' SND

O'Dowd (1981) Ulster - 'One of the main words recorded referring to a team of people working together. The term is found only in Ulster being conspicuously absent further south than Co. Cavan' (38).

Williams W (1956) Boon-day: when a new tenant took over the out-going one wouldn't have ploughed for the season - so the neighbouring farmers would help the new tenant with his task. Over fifty pairs of horses may be involved'.

### CLIPPING BAND

Littlejohn (1963)

'The clipping band was composed of all the shepherds in the parish, and most of the farmers too. Each year at clipping time (early July) the band went round every farm and clipped all the sheep. The order in which they visited farms was fixed by tradition and never varied. It was the duty of the farmer to feed the band every day it worked on his farm. ... Apart from the communal meals eaten throughout the day, the men did not turn up in their dirtiest clothes ... but in newly cleaned clothes. Often at the end of a day's clipping there would be impromptu fiddling, singing and dancing. There was always festivity of some sort after the day's clipping'.(49)

### COORING

From Irish *comhair* (aid; partnership)

Arensberg (1950)

General term applied to neighbour cooperation.

### DAUBING

OSA II 22-3 Dornock parish, Dumfriesshire

'The farm houses, in general, and all the cottages are built of mud or clay; yet these houses when plaistered and properly finished (as many of them are) are exceedingly warm and comfortable. The manner of erecting them is singular. In the first place they dig out the foundations of the house and lay a row or two of stones, then they procure, from a pit contiguous, as much clay or brick-earth as is sufficient to form the walls; and having provided a quantity of straw, or other litter to mix with the clay, upon a day appointed, the whole neighbourhood, male and female, to the number of twenty or thirty, assemble, each with a dung fork, a spade or some other instrument. Some fall to the working the clay or the mud, by mixing it with straw; others carry the materials; the four or six of the most experienced hands build and take care of the walls. In this manner the walls of the house are finished in a few hours; after which they retire to a good dinner and plenty of drink, which is provided for them, where they have music and a dance, with which, and other marks of festivity, they conclude the evening. This is called a *daubing*; and in this manner they make a frolic of what would otherwise be a very dirty and disagreeable job'.



## **DRINKING**

OSA 1 59 - Dumfriesshire 1795

SND

'When any of the lower people happen to be reduced by sickness, losses or misfortunes of any kind, a friend is sent to as many of the neighbours as they think needful, to invite them to what they call 'a drinking'. This drinking (is) a small beer, with a bit of bread and cheese, and sometimes a small glass of brandy or whisky, previously provided by the needy person or their friends. After collecting a shilling a piece ... they (guests) divert themselves ... with music and dancing ... Such as cannot attend themselves usually send their charitable contribution by any neighbour'.

## **JOIN [JONE, JUNE, JOUNE, JINE, etc]**

CSD

'A social gathering or outing: an association of neighbours for some communal task'.

O'Dowd (1981) 53-54

'... the term *join* is recorded from seven counties of Ulster: Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone and also from the two Leinster counties of Meath and Offaly. Of the sixteen records found, eleven meant an exchange labour agreement between two farmers only and ten of these were concerned with the mutual borrowing of horses and labour between two farmers to make up a two-horse plough team'.

In Scotland (as opposed to Ulster) the term seems to have become associated with the consumption of alcohol, particularly to excess, and thus was spoken of by some in derogatory terms:

The SND editors thus defined it as

'The clubbing together of several persons in order to obtain money to purchase drink: also the persons so doing and hence a social gathering, treat or outing'.

## **LOVEDARG**

'A piece of work or service done gratuitously out of friendliness as by one neighbour to help another'. SND

'A piece of work or service done, not for hire, but merely for affection'. SND

'Lovedarg. Well a lovedarg is - that's different from a ploughin match. Say you took a farm over and you had no equipment yourself - you'd just put in to this farm. All the neighbours and that would come and plough the ground for ye. And that's what ye call a lovedarg'. John Fisher, SSS SA 1988.20



Synonyms:- Day's Ploughing; Friendly Darg; Giving a Day; Ploughing Darg; Ploughing Day (All *Perthshire Courier*)

### **MARROW / MORROW**

To associate or join in partnership - late 18th century - of small farmers cooperating in certain tasks. CSD

Renfrewshire 1795 Stat. Account II 123

'The farmers begin to plough about the beginning of March; and a great many of them join, two and two, to make out a plough, which, in the language of the country, is called marrowing'.

A Cameron Smith 'Dalswinton Before Patrick Miller' *Dumfries 1931-3 Transactions of Dumfries and Galloway Antiquary Society* (191). Referring to the organisation of the estate in the mid 18th century, Smith says

'Four tenants "marrowing" together combined their beast and horse-power for the plough and cooperated at the hay and harvest'.

O'Dowd (1981) 57-58 states that the term 'morrowing' is 'confined to a particular area in the north of the country including the counties of Antrim and Derry, East Donegal and East Tyrone'. The term was said variously to denote an exchange agreement between either two farmers only or a team of workers.

Old Scots marrow c.1470: 'to associate with' [of uncertain, probably Scandinavian origin]'. SND

### **NEIGHBOUR WI'**

To cooperate with (one's neighbours) especially in agricultural jobs. CSD

### **NEIGHBOURING**

'To cooperate with one's neighbours' SND

*The Scotsman* 23 July 1954

'The changing times are bringing about the slow death of the old Highland custom known as neighbouring. Under this system the neighbours co-operated at the clippings and other big events which demand a big labour force'.

Still in use, late 20th Century in Perthshire.

### **NEIPERING**

Kinellar, Aberdeenshire. SND. Neighbouring farmers lent each other their horses in turn 'till each man's land was ploughed. 'Neiperling' is the name for this custom.' Dr Gregor, c.1892. *Crombie Ms.*

## **QUARTER**

A group of weavers who joined together for the performance of common tasks.  
CSD

## **SEISRICHEADH / SEISRICHICH**

Allan McColl, Moidart, 1996:

‘The ploughing was a considerable event for each crofter and the neighbouring crofters would all team up together to save time and labour. Communal labour and community support were vital to the crofting community. *Seisricheadh*, as this was called, was practised regularly for a wide variety of croft-related activities and was an effective method of binding communities together and ensuring that each croft in the township was functioning properly’ (SSS Class Project)

## **SHEAR DARG**

A day’s work at reaping or shearing (as a feudal service to a landlord). CSD

## **THIG**

To beg, solicit a free gift esp. from friends as when setting up in housekeeping, business, etc.

Gregor 1881 *Notes on the Folk-lore of the North-East*: 178

‘The new tenant ... went from farm to farm, and got a peck or two from this one, a lippie from the next one, a hattish-cogful from the next one. This was called “thiggin the seed”.

Gregor 1881: 160

‘Very often on New Year’s day companies of young men in twos, threes, and fours set out shortly after breakfast to “thigg” for an old woman, or an old man, or an aged couple, or an invalid that might be in narrow circumstances’.

Burt 1815 *Letters From a Gentleman in the North of Scotland II*: 188

‘At a young Highlander’s first setting up for himself, he goes about among his near relations and friends; and from one he begs a cow, from another a sheep; a third gives him seed to sow his land; and so on, till he has procured for himself a tolerable stock for a beginner. This they call thigging’.

Inverness-shire 1845 NSA XIV: 473

‘The fishers marry at an early age, and generally before they acquire the means of furnishing a house even with the necessary articles. To compensate in some measure for the deficiency, the custom of thigging, as it is called, is adopted by the young wife a few days after marriage. She, accompanied by her bride’s-maid,

visits her neighbours and friends, and they each present her with some little article of house-plenishing, generally a piece of earthenware, usage permitting the visitor to choose what articles he pleases’.

Gregor 1874 *An Echo of the Olden Time from the North of Scotland*:109

‘One or more days were given to the thigging of wool from her friends and neighbours’.

Scots Magazine 1818 (Aug) 127

‘If a man has an acre or two to sow, for which he has neither seed nor money to purchase it, he goes a thigging among the farmers. He is not considered a beggar’.

### **TIMCHEALL (TINCHEL; TINCKHELL)**

A large congregation of huntsmen communally working to surround deer and gather them in for the kill.

Walter Scott, in a note to *Lady of the Lake*, Canto, v says:

‘A circle of sportsmen, who, by surrounding a great space, and gradually narrowing, brought immense quantities of deer together, which usually made desperate efforts to break through the *tinchel*’.

John Taylor, the London based ‘water poet’, who journeyed through Scotland in 1618, gave what is probably the best surviving account of this Highland practice in operation. The scene was the Braes of Mar:

‘Five or sixe hundred men doe rise early in the morning, and they doe disperse themselves divers wayes, and seven, eight or tenne miles compasse, they do bring or chase in the deere in many heards (two, three, or foure hundred in a heard) to such or such a place, as the noblemen shall appoint them; then when day is come, the Lords and gentlemen of their companies, doe ride or goe to the said places, sometimes wading up to the middles through bournes and rivers: and then they being come to the place, doe lye downe on the ground, till those foresaid scouts which are called the tinckhell, doe bring downe the deere: but as the proverbe sayes of a bad cooke, so these tinckell men doe like (lick) their owne fingers; for besides their bowes and arrows which they carry with them, wee can heare now and then a harquebusse or a musket goe off, which they doe seldom discharge in vaine: Then after we had stayed there three houres or thereabouts, we might perceive the deere appeare on the hills round about us (their heads making a shew like a wood), which being followed close by the tinckhell, are chased downe into the valley where we lay; then all the valley on each side being way-laid with a hundred couple of strong Irish grey-hounds, they are let loose as occasion serves upon the head of deere, that with dogges, gunnes, arrowes, durkes, and daggers, in the space of two houres, fourescore fat deere were slaine, which after are disposed of some one way, and some

another, twenty and thirty miles, and more than enough left for us to make merry  
withall at our rendezvous.' (Hume Brown, 1891: 122-3)

# APPENDIX TWO

## TRANSCRIPTIONS OF INTERVIEWS

### Appendix 2.A

Interview with Norman West  
Pitlochry  
SA 1988.18

GW: So where was it you were born?

NW: Well, I was born in virtually a but and ben, really. My father was the grieve on a farm at Airtully.

GW: Airtully - that's near Stanley?

NW: Yes, uh hu - between Stanley and Murthly, about eight miles or ten miles north of Perth. As I say it was just a but n ben, because it was just a farm cottage, cause my father worked as a grieve on a fairly large farm. And all the family were brought up in this little cottage, virtually a but n ben. Although later it had additional rooms built. But there was twelve of a family of us spread over the appropriate number of years which meant that as each son or daughter grew up they usually left home and made space for the younger ones coming on.

GW: So what size of farm was it?

NW: Well you must appreciate that I was only a wee laddie, virtually seven years old when I left that particular place to move to Grandtully, so as regards the acreage of the farm, I'm not very sure. I know that it contained four pairs of horses and an orrae man, and it was ... mostly arable and stock.

GW: So presumably it would have four main ploughman, one for each pair?

NW: Yes, and my father as I say was grieve, controlling four men and some casual labour at the busy harvest times - potatoes, hay times, etc., you see?

GW: So he was grieve which was foreman, type thing?

NW: Yes, he was responsible virtually for the running of the farm and all aspects of farming. The farmer was a gentleman type farmer, as you'd best describe him. He wasn't the actual owner of the farm. He was a tenant. The actual owner of the farm was Murthly Estates - the Fotheringhams, a titled family who lived in Murthly - the castle or something, I don't know. Fotheringham was their name anyway. The farmer - my father's direct boss - was virtually a tenant farmer. A gentleman farmer.

GW: And he was in residence all the time?

NW: In residence in the farm house, and all the workers lived in the cottages all around. Now the rent for these cottages - I think my father did pay a small rent, but it would only be very small. He'd be paid a - I suppose it would be a weekly



wage in those days - and each pendicle as it was known as - each house would have maybe four acres of croft which they worked at weekends, etc., to produce ... they kept a couple of pigs, a couple of cows, and this supplemented their wages, you see? That was the system they worked.

GW: So they just had to work that in their spare time?

NW: Yes, with the work of their families - their sons, etc., in the evenings in the summer time and at weekends. It was a hard life but that was the way it was run.

GW: The likes of yourself, and you brothers and sisters - they would have been - when they were involved in the work, it would have been on this pendicle?

NW: Yes, as I say I was only a wee lad at the time, and we left this and this is only in my faintest of memories. We then left this and moved to a farm of our own in the Grandtully area, some twenty five miles north ... where it was a much smaller farm and my father was actually the tenant.

GW: So presumably he saved up through his life to gain this. This was quite an achievement, was it?

NW: Well, in the eyes of his fellow workers I suppose it was a tremendous achievement.

GW: But this was obviously a much smaller farm, so was he just himself - there was no outside help apart from the family?

NW: Just the immediate family. I remember well the day of the flittin. It consisted of two tractors, and bogies loaded up with the furniture. Mind you, some of the livestock had been moved up maybe two weeks earlier, because I remember on the actual day of the flittin my father and my immediate elder brother Bert were actually at the farm when we arrived with the tractors. My other brothers - Dave, the oldest one - was driving the tractor with the various furniture and additional bits and pieces - stock and what not - which was a Sunday, actually we moved. I can't just remember the time o year but I know it was very very cold. I think it was the back end, winter time.

GW: What age were you at this point?

NW: Eh, seven years old. And I well remember my mother and sisters walkin up to the farm for the first time. It was so cold that I got off ... trying to get the circulation again, it was so cold we were sitting up on top o the tractor comin up the road with the furniture and what not, it was just frozen. So my brother got me off and we walked up to the farm. And I well remember the trek up through the braes o the farm. I wasn't used to braes.

GW: This was a Highland area as opposed to the Lowland..

NW: That's right. And confronted with trying to install ourselves with all the bits and pieces on the farm. To me it was a great exciting time.

GW: So when you left the old farm, the actual moving, was that all done off your own bat, or did you get any help from outwith?

NW: Well we were assisted by an uncle who had a haulage business. He had lorries and he helped with the actual moving of the heavy items and the livestock we had. It was just bare minimum. A couple of cows and ...

GW: So this was just the livestock your father had on his pendicle?

NW: Yes, yes uh hu, and machinery. I think he did buy additional stock from a farmer he knew well in the vicinity, back in Airntully, just to establish a new stock in the farm. Just the bare minimum requirements at that stage, because it took years and years to build up a stock, but just maybe a couple of cows and a few calves, and the horses of course. No tractors in those days.

GW: So how many horses would there be?

NW: Two, just two horses. Three at a later stage - an additional one, an orrae horse. But two basically was the mainstay of the working force. And there was just my elder brother Bert and my father, two sisters and myself, and my mother of course. That was the remains of the family to Balnabeggan.

GW: So presumably by this time you'd be at school - you'd started school. How did that work in terms of the work you had to do on the farm?

NW: Yes, my two sisters, Dorothy, Isobel and myself attended Grandtully school when we first moved to Balnabeggan. Now, my father being a - slave driver (laughs) - we all had our jobs to do prior to going to school. Obviously the lighter work was reserved for the girls - they fed the hens - incidentally, my mother was always responsible for the hens. She reared the chicks, she was responsible for the hens. The income from the eggs etc., went towards the housekeeping and that was her responsibility. She took it upon herself as being ... And then my sisters, they fed the hens, they fed the pigs. They boiled the meat for the pigs. It was a various routine that was gone through, you know. I - although maybe the early stages when we moved first to Balnabeggan, not being too robust physically, I was responsible for feeding cattle, etc. That consisted of mucking out the byres, slicing neeps, carrying the neeps to the troughs and feedin.. and the byres and what not, bedding them. Just general cattleman work, as it were. I had to feed them prior to going to school and muck them out.

GW: So what did that entail in terms of getting up?

NW: Well, the school normally started at nine o'clock if I remember rightly. So it meant gettin up probably about half past seven, getting out to feed the cattle. My father had already been out by that time and done the milking. My brother attended to the horses, mucking out the horses, and while he was doing the horses, I was startin the cattle. And of course I had to be in and washed and cleaned up to get to school for nine o'clock. Many the day I was late and was runnin down through the fields if I was late in getting up in the morning. But the task had to be done and done properly. My father ensured it was done properly and woe betide you if it wasn't. We didn't bother coming home for lunch - the school was down in the village, two mile away which we just ran back and forward to ... We'd just have lunch at school and come home at four o'clock and it was off with your school clothes and into your working togs and into the routine again. Now, not so much in the summer time, but in the winter time you'd to hurry home from school and get started because light was against you. You must appreciate there was no electricity in those days - it was all done by lanterns. And you were virtually working against light as it were. So you got most of it done before darkness really fell if you could. And my brother and father would be out in the fields workin and I had to have the cattle more or less

finished by the time they come in from the fields. And ma sisters, they would be responsible for their - feeding the hens and what not - pigs - and various matters like that. So it was just a question of - although there was always more work to do in the evenings, at night, than there was in the morning. You prepared everything at night for the following morning. Cutting up turnips and what not, obviously. And everything had to be done thoroughly. As I say, woe betide you if it wasn't done by the time my father came home. Because they would have had a hard day with whatever they were doing in the fields, because most of the ploughing you see was done in the winter months if the weather was open - the back end, and the early spring. It was a mixed farm - stock, cattle - we did keep some sheep in the winter time, we wintered hogs. But that's another story - they were brought in and you got a rent for looking after maybe a hundred, a hundred and twenty hogs. We wintered them for the winter months from some of the Highland glens, they were brought down and taken back. They had to be rounded up every Sunday and counted and what not. And it was quite a task in the heavy snow in the winters. The farm comprised of approximately a hundred acres of rough grazing - woodland and hill, and about sixty-five acres of arable. Now the husbandry was rotation of crops, i.e., potatoes, corn - not barley it was rye - hay, turnips. These were the main crops and of course all done in rotation. One of the main crops to produce most money was potatoes. We used to grow quite an acreage of potatoes, relative to the acres we had on the farm, of course. When I say quite an acreage, maybe twenty, twenty-five acres. And the harvesting of them was very hard work, I can tell you, because we were not in the position to pay additional labour at the lifting of the potatoes and so the family virtually had to do it all ourselves.

GW: So that was entirely a family thing there was ...

NW: Well in the early years - latterly as we progressed through the years and we became more efficient and moved from horses to tractors, we did employ casual labour for the lifting of the potatoes.

GW: That was done purely on a piece work basis?

NW: Yes, I remember well it was an eight hour day, and it used to be seven and six a day per head for an eight hour day. And it was very very hard work, I can tell you. Although as the years passed and I matured physically I was more able to be more of an asset to my father as it were.

GW: Yes. But in these early days, was that just expected of you without any pay. Did you get pocket money or anything for the work you did?

NW: No, we didn't get pocket money as such. If we went - were going to a concert or being taken to a concert or anything like that obviously we got some money to jangle in our pockets, but we didn't get pocket money as such. Mind you, although I say it was a hard life, we were well fed, and you know, ..

GW: Were you virtually self sufficient in terms of the food you ate on the farm, it was all grown yourself? Was there much bought in at all?

NW: Well, there was always meat, etc. bought in, but my mother with her hens, we always had eggs, we always had milk and therefore had butter. She did make cheese, but not regularly, you couldn't say you was - she didn't make cheese to



the extent she made butter, let's say that. And of course, my brother and I used to do a bit of poaching. In those days rabbits were plentiful, pheasants, although the ground was stalked by a keeper, we weren't supposed to do that, but never the less, we used to keep a ferret and did a bit of rabbit poaching, etc. No there was always plenty food. Money was scarce but there was always plenty food.

GW: So the likes of the eggs, etc., and the butter, was that sold outwith?

NW: No, well my mother did sell eggs, she sold them to the grocer and anyone who wanted to buy them. Actually the nuns who had a big house in Strathtay used to come up regularly to buy eggs from my mother. That's something that sticks in my memory, to see two or three nuns coming wandering up through the field. And my mother was quite delighted to see them, and have a wee blether with them and looked forward to meeting them. They were very nice ladies.

GW: So the neighbouring farm - was there not another tenanted farm just beside yours?

NW: Oh yes, in those days, the Strath comprised of farms of virtually all the same acreage approximately. Supported families of two and four right up the Strath, and they worked on the same basis, more or less, mixed farming of cropping and stock, mainly cattle.

GW: Did you take much to do with the neighbours in terms of ...

NW: The immediate neighbours worked in a neighbourly fashion, for example, during the very busy seasons, at harvest time, which in those days, you were always fighting against the weather conditions - you'd to make hay while the sun shines, as it were - anyone that was willing to help was much appreciated.

GW: There wasn't an organised basis of you help us at the haymaking and we'll help you?

NW: Not really, my memories of it was that you got on with your own work and they did the same, although in tasks where it was essential to have additional labour, it was organised. An example I can give you was the travelling thrashing mills, which came again at the back end after the harvest or the early Spring where all the harvesting was done - the neighbouring farms from five or six farms around always organised themselves and you did the same in return. Because you can appreciate the travelling mill went from one farm to the next in the immediate neighbourhood for the threshings. And the organised labour was essential then, cause you only had it usually for a day, a day and a half, according to the size of each farm and the amount of thrashing that had to be done.

GW: So that was quite labour intensive?

NW: Very labour intensive. A big day on the farm, the day of the travelling thrashing mill. They usually arrived the evening before, the two mill men, it was pulled by a tractor, a big heavy tractor, and the mill itself was quite a bulky machine, you know, and up these old farm roads it was quite a task to manipulate round the various corners and what not to get the machine in the .. stack yard. Not always in the farm court yard, in the stack yard, it had to be. They used to build the stacks in rows, built equi-distant, so that the actual mill could be run between the .. corn stacks so that you could .. And then you used to fork the sheaves from the stacks onto the - it was a procedure you went

through, through the mill. Many the day I've spent feeding sheaves to my father on the mill. And then there was men to bag the grain, carry it away, others took the straw away. It was sheaves of course, big sheaves and it was built on what we call sow stacks. Shaped just like a house. All the grain was carted into the granary in big bags, and then of course it had to be dressed after that for sale, for seed, and various food stuffs.

GW: So when these neighbours came that wasn't on a payment basis, that was just expected because you went and helped them..

NW: That's right it was return, no payment. They were fed of course, again it was a busy day for my mother and my sisters, they catered, did all the catering which consisted of meals around the tables. We, incidentally, weren't fed, the family weren't fed until after, well my father and my brothers, the workers were, but the children weren't fed til after all the adults had had their food and were out again workin. That consisted of three very substantial meals per day - breakfast, dinner and supper, with tea breaks in between, morning and afternoon.

Break.

GW: So in the early days was there much sharing of machinery between the farms, or did each farm always have its own implements?

NW: Aye, well really in the early days, remember we're speaking of the days of horses mostly, and maybe the early tractor models, but each farm virtually had every - the implements were simple. Therefore each farm had all the implements, the simple implements that were required, you know, harrows, ploughs, sowing machines, binders - horse-drawn binders, mowers, the simple tools, and therefore there was no additional sharing of implements required. Each farm basically had their own. It only came later on when combine harvesters for example came into use. Although on marginal land farms, hill farms, the combine harvesters weren't very common, because the fields weren't designed, they weren't suitable for such large machines. But the earlier models were smaller and maybe one farmer, the biggest of a group of maybe four or five, had one combine harvester and it was shared around, because you can appreciate they got through the harvest much quicker with a combine harvester than the old system of a binder and stooks and what not. Just at a later stage I recall this happen. In the early days each farm virtually had its own basic implements and tools.

GW: So in the later days with the combines, the small combines, would one farmer buy it and then rent it out or would they all club together to buy it, or can you remember?

NW: No, I don't think they would have clubbed together to buy it. I think, as I say the largest farm - the most well-to-do of the farmers may have bought it and he may have either charged for the labour factor, so much an hour or so much an acre or whatever, or if it was an immediate neighbour he may get labour return for something else in lieu of the labour he provided with the combine. I think that was the way they worked it.



GW: So the produce which was taken to market, the market would be Aberfeldy, would it?

NW: Well, when you speak of produce, the produce being cattle in the form of beef. It used to be - it was mainly a special sale - there was sales I think every month, but there was a special sale, I think it was the month of February, about the twentieth of February roughly, there was a special sale and that was the one we always aimed to have our cattle ready for. The longer winter nights - all through the winter you're feeding up the best of yer stirks as they were called, which is bull calves and heifer calves fattened up and many a winter night we used to brush them up just prior to the sale to get them looking their best condition for the sale. You were always after the best price you could get. That was a big day, the big special sale in Aberfeldy. It was a long day, you know they had to be floated by truck to the market, penned and you got all - prior to them going in to the ring for sale they were brushed up.

GW: So the truck which took the livestock to the market, that wouldn't have belonged to your father, he wouldn't have had a truck of his own?

NW: No no, no no, that would have been a local haulage contractor who would have trucked the cattle to the market. Perhaps I should say, incidentally, that the cattle, they were all home bred, we kept a bull, an Aberdeen Angus bull. The aim was of course to produce good beef you see. Mind you every farmer didn't have a bull. Because they used to borrow ours or bring the cow to the bull. But we always had a bull, and it was all home breeding you see. So that was the way it was done. As I say it was an Aberdeen Angus bull and cross cows. The aim was to have Blackpole cross stirks. The calves - the milking cows, we always had two milking cows, of course - their calves were pail fed, they were given their milk from a pail, where as the suckler calves, they ran with their mothers open in the reeds, and that was the way they were reared. And of course after the calves were speined as the term is, that's taken away from their mother after the milk was finished - maybe by this time they'd be what, six, nine months old, seven months old - speined as I say the term was - they were fed on turnips and hay and as it came nearer the time of the sales they were fed on special cake, cattle cake, bruised oats - we had a bruiser of our own. We had a small mill and a bruiser of our own - bruised oats to feed them up with the aim to produce good sale value cattle for the February sales.

GW: So when the neighbours brought the cows to your bull or you took the bull to the neighbouring farms, could you make that into a profit making thing for your father, or was that done purely on a neighbourly ...

NW: To be honest, I don't know how that worked. There must have been a fee. I reckon there would have been a fee. The modern day there's artificial insemination, but in those days it was all done with a bull, a good workin bull. But I don't know how the financial transactions occurred.

GW: But that was quite a regular thing, it wasn't a one off?

NW: Oh no, we always had an Aberdeen Angus bull and some o the neighbourin farms didn't have a bull at all. Their cattle was served by our bull, that was the way it worked.

GW: So as you got a wee bit older on the farm, did your tasks change from in the early days. Were you given any more special responsibilities?

NW: Well as I grew older and more physically able, I was the orrae man on the farm, I had a wee horse o my own, and I was able to do every day one-horse tasks, you know, harrowing, rolling, cart work. Virtually an orrae man's job, which I dearly loved. I had a great love for horses. My brother did all the ploughing and that with this pair o horses. I couldn't do any of the ploughing, I was too small. Well I have ploughed, I've had a shot from my brother, but I wasn't physically able to go an plough a field myself as it were. But I did a lot of orrae work, with the horse as I say. Carting turnips, the harvest time we'd a horse and cart, harrowing, drill work and that. All work capable of being done with a single horse.

GW: So what age would you be when you were entrusted with that?

NW: Oh, twelve, onwards.

GW: So you'd still be at school?

NW: Oh yes, still at school. This was done in the evenings in the summer months, and all weekends, all my holidays. It was full time on the farm as far as work was concerned in my early days. This is ranging from as I say, twelve until I left school at fifteen.

GW: When you did eventually leave school you never thought of carrying on on the farm?

NW: Well it was my father's wish for me to carry on on the farm. But the size of the farm wasn't large enough to support my father, his family and my brother who was full time on the farm, older than me - Bert - so it was - my mother said I had to bail out and get a job. Some other means of earning a living. So actually you just had to take what was going at the time and it was - I left school on the Friday. Actually my sister worked with a firm, McKerachers in Aberfeldy as a bus conductress, and this McKerachers was a fairly large firm and comprised of - they had a garage, mechanics, electricians and what not, and I was sent packing off to see if I could get a job as a motor mechanic. Serve an apprenticeship. When I arrived to seek the young boss, Mr. McKeracher, he said 'No, I'm afraid we haven't got an opening but we have an opening for the electrician's side'. So that was me, my future was - (laughs) I started on the following Monday. I remember it was July, the middle of July, as an apprentice electrician. And that was my career carved out for me.

GW: So going back to the farm, before you left school, what fuel was used. Would that be wood, mainly?

NW: Yes, yes, as I say, earlier on I told you that we had roughly a hundred acres of hill land and rough grazing and woodland, and we did cut a lot of wood. It wasn't all wood, there was coal - we'd a railway station at Grandtully, a railway line between Ballinluig and Aberfeldy at that time. The coal was brought by rail to the local siding at Grandtully station. As was all the - cattle and that was trucked via the railway. It was the main stay, the main line as it were to Aberfeldy for trading. A very busy little line it was. About seven or eight trains went up and down every day - except Sunday of course.

GW: So was there a coal merchant locally?

NW: There was a local coal merchant, yes, and he delivered the coal, horse and cart. We used to actually pick up our own coal from the railway wagons at Grandtully station, maybe fifteen hundred weight or a ton at a time with a horse and cart.

GW: So you weren't going through the coal merchant?

NW: Oh yes, it was all done through the local coal merchant. It was bought through the local coal merchant. But we bought in bulk as it were, it wasn't two bags a week. It was usually a ton at a time, or thereabouts, during the winter months. And all the cooking and that was done, my mother on an open range, although latterly she progressed to a paraffin stove. Remember I told you we had no electricity in those days. Although latterly we did manage to get hold of a three kilowatt generator. As I say, I was now serving my time as an apprentice electrician and I remember wiring the steading and the house although it was very limited because it was only lighting we could have from this small three kilowatt generator. But even that was a great asset to the farm buildings, especially for feeding stock and what not in the winter months. My father thought it was tremendous.

GW: So the coal would be burnt with wood?

NW: With wood, yes mixture of wood.

GW: That was all just taken off your own land?

NW: Yes the wood. That was an agreement with the Laird. You were allowed so much firewood. Round the perimeter of the fields, the overhanging branches, the oak trees and what not you were allowed to trim them. That was for fire wood. Birch and oak mainly in our location was the main woods. Oak was a very good burning wood. That was part of the agreement, you were allowed to do that. But my mother, I don't know how she managed in those days preparing meals on an open range but the food was always wholesome and - as I say she did latterly get a paraffin stove and then calor gas - portable calor gas came into being and again that was a great boon in those isolated rural communities.

GW: Was there much in the way - you said your mum made cheese and butter - did she do anything else in the way of home industry that could bring an extra ...?

NW: Well she used to rear turkeys. As I said earlier on she was responsible for the hens and she always reared chicks and she did rear turkeys which she fattened up for Christmas time maybe up to about twenty turkeys. And we did have ducks and what not as well which again she - they were a stronger type of egg, I don't know if you have ever tasted one, they were used for baking. Mother did a lot of baking but hens eggs were most popular for sale, she used to sell a lot of eggs. From memory there was an egg marketing board and all the eggs had to be graded. They were collected I remember every Friday and Thursday nights we used to sit and clean the eggs, wash the eggs and pack them into crates in dozens to be lifted on the Friday. That was a great income from my mother's contribution.

GW: And they'd be sold locally?



NW: No, they went to Perth Egg Marketing Board. There was eggs sold locally as well, remember I told you to the nuns and anyone that was - shopkeepers and what not - the local grocer used to buy eggs for sale on his van as he went round the rural community. So my mother did contribute in that respect to the economy of the farm.

GW: So your involvement with your neighbours, for instance at harvest time, was there competition to see who could get all theirs in first and was there much jealousy, rivalry and that sort of thing, or was it a friendly atmosphere?

NW: Well from our point of view, as far as I can remember, it was always - if there was any rivalry it was on a friendly basis. But that didn't always apply throughout the country, I mean your neighbour could be awkward and jealous of your achievements for example if the weather was good and you got your harvest in on time you know working all the hours God gave you - daylight - and maybe the weather broke and maybe your neighbour hadn't achieved that we would volunteer our services which was readily accepted in our case, but that wouldn't always be the case throughout the country. As I say there is and was rivalry between farmers.

GW: But in your case you would help out on a purely voluntary basis. They would never come and say, 'could you give us a hand?'

NW: No, a farmer like everyone else had pride - they wouldn't come and ask. It was - not expected of you, but you would see that your labour would be appreciated and you would volunteer your help for non-payment. You would expect if it happened to you in reverse, it would be reciprocated as it were.

GW: Was that with immediate neighbours or was it like one - presumably everybody would know everybody else within so many miles radius?

NW: Oh yes, this would apply mostly to your immediate neighbours maybe comprising three or four. You wouldn't go outwith maybe four or five miles radius to do this. Your immediate neighbours would be within - your immediate neighbours, you know your marching neighbours this would apply to. Although I believe in modern times it's entirely different. Harvesting etc., it's very much quicker now with all the machinery. I know my two nephews at Tulliemet there, they actually offer their service on a hired basis to any farm within thirty miles radius and such like as I say the timing now is very much quicker. But the days we're speaking about, the early days, you were all out and you had to work all the hours God gave you to meet the demand.

GW: Both at Balnabeggan and Airntully most labour that did come in was done on a piece work basis i.e. they were paid cash, is that right?

NW: Yes well, back in the days of Airntully, the farm was a much larger farm the acreage was much larger and therefore the crops were bigger. For example, the neep hoving time - that's the thinning of the turnips - it was all done by hand and during the early summer months it was quite a sight to see whole families thinning the turnips in rows. It used to be the case I think if I remember correctly, a family would be allocated an acre or so many drills and they would do that and that was done on a piece work basis. And the neighbouring family

would maybe have the next bit and this would be the way it worked. Tinkers often used to be brought in even to do turnip thinning and turnip pulling ...

GW: So when this happened on your own farm or the farm that your father was grieve on, you as part of his family, were you still paid the same way as everybody else was or were you expected to do it for nothing?

NW: Well the family within the family were expected to do it for nothing, but my father would have been - still had his piece work basis although he was grieve of the farm he was responsible for having work done. But his family would still benefit from the piece work basis that other families would have got with evening work and what not, turnip howing and all the other tasks that extra labour was - you can appreciate during the summer months during the cropping all these tasks went on simultaneously. The hired hands on the farm weren't able to cope with everything on the time allocated to them. Extra hired casual labour was done usually on a piece work basis.



## Appendix 2.B

### Interview with Will West Aberfeldy SA 1988.19

GW: So where was it you were born?

WW: Airntully.

GW: Airntully, that's near Stanley.

WW: Aye between Murthly and Stanley.

GW: Aye. And what year would that be?

WW: Twenty-sixth o October 1916.

GW: 1916. Right. On a farm presumably?

WW: Well, it was in a wee village they called Airntully and ... we had a wee pendicle. I was the second oldest oot o twelve o a family. On school days you went through yer system in the mornin and did your wee jobbie before you went tae school and when you come back at night you had to do the same thing. Feed the beasts and sort the pigs out - turnips and tatties.

GW: So that was before you went to school and ...

WW: And when you come back. Saturday forenoon it was - you know you had the sticks to get in and a the odd jobs to get done before he came home at dinnertime or else.

GW: Or else you were for it?

WW: For it!

GW: And that was just expected of you?

WW: It was expected o ye. Just as you was able to do it you had it to do. You know. Startin wi Dave right doon the scale.

GW: So each o the family had their own jobs.

WW: Had their own jobs.

GW: So what did you say - what were these jobs?

WW: Well as I said, you had to get the neeps for the cows, the stirks, wash the tatties for the pigs and you know, Saturday forenoon you had to muck a these places oot, like the pigs. There was a wash hole at the back o the byre, where all the wash went in, and that had to be emptied out and carried down the field and spread on the young grass ... That was Saturday forenoon's work, and fill the neep shed o neeps - the neeps was stored [near enough?] and you hurled them in wi a barrie. And you'd to dae a these things. You know - sticks, sawin sticks ... to keep the fire goin.

GW: So that was just expected - you didn't get pocket money or anything ...?

WW: Oh no. No, no, no no. No pocket money. You got yer bite o dinner when you got back from school, and you just had to change into yer old togs and get on wi it.

GW: So that was at weekends and during holidays too presumably.

WW: Oh aye. Well sometimes we went on holidays for a couple o months to Kinpurnie tae the grandparents when you was a bit older and you got chucked oot tae the berry puin there.

GW: Where was that, sorry?

WW: At Kinpurnie, at Newtyle. You got chucked oot tae the berry puin there. You know, puin rasps.

GW: Was that worse or better than bein at home?

WW: Och well, it was a change you know, but you had to be very much on yer toes wi the grandparents. He wasnie sweirt tae tak oot the belt, and it wasnie the kind you held yer hand oot for! Oh aye. It had to be just so so. Bed at a certain time and don't go tae the table until you was asked an say a yer manners and one thing and anither. Ye just had to be on the ball a the time.

GW: Was that on yer father's side or yer mother's side?

WW: Mother's side. Watsons.

GW: Were they farmin people?

WW: Grandfather was grieve on Kinpurnie. A staunch man who never did nothin else but attend tae his garden and did his work and went tae his bed at nine o'clock every night, up in the mornin at five o'clock, roon tae the bothy and chapped up the bothy lads, away down tae the steadin. Came hame at denner time, had his dinner, did his wee bits o chores that he had tae dae - maybe there was a pig you see - then he'd go away down half and hour before yokin time, and he lay doon in a stall and had forty winks afore startin. Every day in life.

GW: Every day in life? Even Sundays?

WW: No no. You was never allowed down near the steadin when he was about. He chased ye for your life. A great man he was really.

GW: So he was grieve? That was the same as yer father was ... So your grandfather - was that a bigger farm than yer ...?

WW: Well in thae days - days o the horses, Gary, it was a hunder acre tae one pair o horse and one man. You know if there was four pair on a place it was roughly four hunder acres. If it was three pair it would be three hunder acre, and so on. That was the way it worked. Course there was usually one or two casual workers, you know. More so women, that did odd jobs as they were needit.

GW: Paid on a piece work basis?

WW: Well, sometimes it was piece work, depends what they were doin.

GW: So ... your grandfather's farm - was it near other farms. Was there ...

WW: Well, it was a good mile from Newtyle, and it marched wi Burnmouth, Denhied, and [Templeton?]. And there was a hill away at the back wi Kinpurnie Castle standin on the tap o it. We used tae go up there for a walk on a Sunday. Our grandparents would maybe take us up there for a walk on a Sunday.

GW: So, was there much comin and goin between these farms? Was there much in the way o sharin horses or machinery, or ...

WW: No, never anythin like that. Never. Everybody had their own individual set up. Horse and [templemans?] and what need you. The only time they helped one another was when the thrashin mill - the travellin thrashin mill cam in aboot.

GW: Aye, that'd be - once a year then?

WW: Oh no, different times o year. Sometimes, you know you'd maybe hae a thrash at the back end, and then usually Spring a thrash for the seed corn for the incomin year, you see. And then always roon aboot May month, if it wasnie a done by that time, there was a big thrash at May month, before the twenty-eighth o May. Either wheat or corn, it didnae maiter. I've seen us two and three days at the same place at the mill.

GW: So how did that work, was there somebody - a private mill owner who came ...?

WW: Yes, he travelled the countryside with a steam engine and a mill behind it and a caravan where he slept. For two millmen. They only slept in there. Wherever they was in the mornin they got their breakfast. Ye got yer piece at mid yokin at ten o'clock, and ye got yer dinner, piece at three o'clock and then they got their tea. And a the men that was in aboot the place was in the same boat.

GW: I see. So all the neighbourin farms would come to the one farm ...?

WW: Well, no them all. If there wis maybe say four farms involved outside the one ye was at, you'd maybe get one man or maybe two men off each place to make up about fourteen men. Usually two women up on the top by lousin. You know what I mean by lousin?

GW: No really.

WW: One o the millmen stood in the hole in the mill; one louser stood there and the other stood there, and the men forked off the stacks onto these boards. And they had a knife - the women had a knife in their hand, and they liftit the sheaf, cut the string and handit to the millmen and he stood there and riddled it into the trough. All the one way - no time aboot - but heads all the one way. And then they just kept goin. They'd draw the mill in atween two rows o stacks you see. Which would maybe be aboot fourteen, sixteen feet wide, tae let the mill in, cause when the mill was travellin forward they let the boards doon, you see Gary, then they [ ? ] And each board was close to the stack - two stacks, one man on each stack, forkin to each o his lousers - that side and then that side. The result would be that maybe that two stacks would maybe be done before ten o'clock. And the other two would maybe be done - depends on the size o them - by denner time. That'd maybe be eight to ten stacks in the day. Depends what size they were. And you've maybe - depends where the grain was goin - it was usually weighed up into hunderweight -and-a-half bags. And maybe be ... two or three men on there weighin them up and carryin them on yer back, usually up to a bloody granary up the stair so's it was easier loaded onto lorries or carts. It was mostly carts tae the station at that time. You'd hae somebody, the two men on the stacks, maybe another one heavin ower the sheaves, and then there'd be a man buildin the straw - the straw stack, and there'd be folk trailin the bunches fae the back o the mill tae the stack for the man tae fork them onto the stack. And then a casual worker or a woman at the chaff that cam oot the end o the mill, carryin it away in a caff sheet or rakin it back into a heap. ... And the other millman just went roond aboot to see everything was goin aright you know. And



then he would go up and have a shot o the feedin for maybe half an hour or an hour if he was the foreman on the mill.

GW: So then the next day you would just go to the next farm ...?

WW: Aye if the mill was goin to a neeberin farm and you would maybe be the one who'd be sent along, usually the bothy lads that got the privilege of goin to the mill, because they got a their grub. You see what I mean?

GW: Yea. So apart from the mill owner or the millmen, there was no money exchanged, it was just the labour.

WW: No.

GW: Like you come and help us and then we'll go and help you.

WW: Well, when I started off at first, Gary, they used to come oot at ten o'clock wi the bottle o whisky. Every man got a nip a piece. That died a natural death of course - it was a stopped. But when I started doin it you used to get it - up to maybe a couple o year after, it just dies a natural death.

GW: Why was that, d'you know?

WW: I don't know, ken what the reason was.

GW: That was the farmer supplied the whisky - whoever was ...

WW: Aye whoever was - the farmer or whoever. At the village o Airntully up there, there'd be - one, two, three, four, five, six - pendicles, and they a had a couple or three stacks o corn, you see? And it was just a hale day or maybe a day and a half includin us as well. But whoever was there in the mornin had to dish out this bottle o whisky, you know, a nip o whisky. Then it would be somebody else the followin year if you know what I mean, but it just died oot a natural death.

GW: And what about food - was that laid on too?

WW: Yea, if it was you in the mornin - if it was us in the mornin at the first thrash then the men got their breakfast in the mornin. The millmen - just the millmen.

GW: Just the millmen. Right.

WW: And then you got your tea at ten o'clock - maybe they'd be finished by about eleven, move tae the other place, thrash it and they would hae tae supply the dinner. But it was time about - it wasnie the same every year, it was just time about, it worked. And it was a the folk that belonged the pendicles and maybe two or three extra men that came in about and helped oot. And that was Adamson at Inveralmond that did that - that was the - them that had the mill - Adamson at Inveralmond.

GW: So he'd have quite a wide area, would he?

WW: Oh aye. Aye. The only ones I can remember havin travellin mills was Adamson at Inveralmond and Crichton o Burrelton. That was only ones that I remember, but they had the hale area tae cover. But a lot of the bigger places, Gary, they had a - more or less a mill inside their own, and it was just certain occasions ye had got this travellin mill in you see. Like Airntully there it was only maybe once a year they got the mill in there for thrashin wheat ... They had a mill o their own, but the straw had to be bunched - wheat for thatchin stacks and

[happin?] tattie pits, you see it had to be [?] in a straw soo and bunched. And that was the reason - the straw.

GW: So the likes o the Airntully farms - the ones that did have their own mills - would any of the other farms around use that?

WW: No no they never used that. No no no.

GW: They just used the travellin mills?

WW: When the mill was thrashin at Airntully you understand, it was their own mill. Still the inside mill they used - they never got the travellin mill in. It was a big - driven be an oil engine.

GW: Right. So when did you leave your father's farm - what age?

WW: Well, I left school - the time I left it was October, tattie holidays. We got three weeks tattie holidays. But I was away a week, maybe a couple o weeks, afore tae gaither tatties. When you gaithered tatties at different farms and when they were finished you went tae the next farm and gaithered tatties - the most ever I got for it was three and six a day, fae eight to five. The least I got was two bob. I can remember that, two bob, eight tae five. And then tatties a finished, well, I startit work on the farm - the main farm. Just doin casual work, spreadin dung and shawin neeps and helpin anyway I can. Me and another chap who left the school at the same time, Jim Anderson, the two o us worked. Then it came the 28th o November which was the term. And then I got on for the orrae laddie - you know the orrae horse, that was the single horse, I got that. But on the term day on the 28th o November that particular year, father and I left Airntully at five o'clock in the mornin wi two carts and went away tae Mains o Fordie away up near Clunie tae flit a foreman tae Airntully in the mornin. No lights on the carts or nothin. Just black dark. And we was back home and emptied by one o'clock.

GW: So this is a foreman comin -

WW: A new man comin.

GW: Aye. So you had to flit him. Was that usual that?

WW: Oh aye, they had to have a horse and cart if it was possible. Sometimes you went away the night afore if it was too far a distance. Stayed the night an then come home the next day. That's the way that life went on at that time, you know.

GW: So what age were you when you left school?

WW: Well I was fourteen. Well I wasnie fourteen you know, but I was away before the holidays. So I worked there wi this orrae horse and if there was a pair needit - if there was a man off ill or something I had tae drive this pair o horse. Three year this went on. And of course all the workers worked at the weekend. If I went away tae play fitba a got hell when I cam back. You know, just anything like that. It had tae be work the hail time. I wanted away a year before that but I wouldnie get, I had tae stay another year. By this time I was driving a pair.

GW: So they're be a new orra man cam up behind you?

WW: Well another laddie startit. They didnae hae housin at Airntully for men, it was - you know one o the houses was a hell of a place. You know this was one o



the reasons why men left, cause the house wasnie good. So the result was, faither had tae give up being a grieve on its own and go back on the horse - first pair o horse when the man left. You know it was discussed wi Mr Cree who was the farmer - aboot this and that was the only alternative, cause father had this pendicle foreby and the house didnae belong to the farm, you know what I mean. It give him decent enough houses for the rest o the men. So I was more or less drivin these horses more or less the last year I was there cause he had his bruise to dae and a the implements to look after and one thing or another. It was kind o a handicap for him. So on the 28th of November 1932 I left there and went to Gellybanks.

GW: Which is where? Is that near by?

WW: Away at Strathord - you know when you're goin doon the A9 it's away up on the right. For a second pair - you know you had two hundred and fifty acre - two and a half pair it was, two hundred and fifty acres at that time. A gey auld-fashioned mannie. You know when you wis ploughin you had to put in this light fur every five yards cause it was all - the seed was sewn be hand, and that was your mark. [ ? ] And you had to put in this mark every five yards. And when you was dressin corn for seed it was done wi a riddle, and you did it round about the way. So as the light stuff went to one end o the riddle. The only place I ever had tae dae it.

GW: Was that quite a small farm then?

WW: Well about two hundred and fifty acre - smaller than the one I was at. There was a married foreman, two single men and heself. Another thing - the only place I did it - was tae make straw ropes wi a thraw crook. You know you stood and windit the thraw crook and somebody fed it intae it and you had tae move back a the time. You know a straw rope maybe aboot two or three inches in diameter for puttin round the easin o the stacks after they're thatched. Anither thing we did, and the only place we did, was cut tatties for plantin. Cut them through the middle. A certain way, no across the way ... but long ways. And you had a sprout on the other side, and they were left to dry before they were planted, Gary.

GW: They were all just for use on your own farm?

WW: Oh aye.

GW: They weren't sold or anything?

WW: No. Then of course when you went to a farm you see, you had yer own pair o horse, yer own harness, ye'd yer own reigns, yer own graip, yer own [danny brush and curricame?]. A'hing was yer own - that was you. And you darn't move till the foreman moved. You stayed behind him all the time. He'd to go oot the stable first, intae the stable first, it was him that fed the - corned the horses. The other boys did the hayin and the beddin.

GW: So what was that you were tellin me before about the trickery ...

WW: [Laughs]. Well as I said there was aye somebody aboot the place that would likit tae dae ye a bad turn - there was aye a bad een aboot a ferm toun. Ye know, jealousy was an awfie thing aboot a farm toon.

GW: Is that what it was, jealousy?

WW: A lot o it wis jealousy. If a man wis a better handit man than his neebor, sort o thing, you see, if the second man was a better handit man than the foreman, there was a lot o jealousy between them. Moreso if the cottar hooses was sittin thegither, the wives would even fa oot aboot it, and a this sort o thing, you see. And he would do these sort o things, you know, maybe as I said, plaster pigs' dung on the collar o a horse and he wouldnae put his nose near it. Or slap it on the stable door either side, no so as it would be seen, but there would be a smell. Cause they hated the stink o pigs. And these are the kind o things. And then they would dae something tae the horse, such as what I was tellin you, aboot puttin a horse hair through their shoulder and they wouldnae put their shoulder to the collar at all. It kind o festered, you know, a scab, and before they realised whit it was, and pu'd it oot. But when you knew they things ... and the horse startit to do these things, if you knew what it was, you had an inspection. You went roon aboot their shooder and see if it was an you'd pu it oot. You know dae these sort o things. The same wi the collar, you would rub its own horse dung on it to take away the smell o the pig off it. Same wi the stable door, rub it wi horse dung, just on baith sides. And they eventually came back tae what they were before. But it was a dirty trick they used to do.

GW: Was that when people were leavin often?

WW: Yes, that's - they never did it if they were stayin, just if they were leavin. The foreman would maybe be leavin at this place and the second man would be goin on tae foreman you see, and this is what they would dae. Maybe in the middle o the night when everybody else was asleep [laughs].

GW: So was there much of that sort o thing between farms, was there rivalry and jealousies?

WW: There wis. There wis a lot o jealousy. You see if there was a grieve aboot a place, Gary, he never made hesel popular wi the men, cause that caused animosity and jealousy among the men, if he was you know, always speakin and carrying on - never got popular wi the men. Worked alongside them and that was it if it had to be. But he would come into the stable on the dot, on the hour. In the door, spit oot the orders, and oot the door. And ye had to be ready to do it. If you were sittin on yer backside he'd tell ye tae get off yer arse, just like that, when A'm given you orders. He'd just start at the top end o the stable and go right ben. Spat oot the orders and oot the other door and that was the end o it. And if you didnae hear what he was sayin, it was too bad. And don't have yer hands in yer pockets, get yer hands oot o yer pockets, don't stand wi yer hands in yer pockets for God's sake.

GW: As bad as that was it?

WW: Oh aye, oh it was hard.

GW: The likes of, say at the harvest time, was there jealousy or that - you wanted to get your harvest in before everybody else, or anything like that?

WW: No, no, you couldnae dae that cause a lot o it depended on the weather, Gary. You know, in the harvest time, like, startin at the beginnin, you know after the term, it was neep storin and ploughin, depends what the weather was. If it was hard weather it was at the dung or cuttin hedges, spreadin dung or fillin the

neep shed wi neeps and the hay loft wi hay and you know maybe thrashin and a this sort o thing. And if that was done before it eased up well you was away cuttin hedges, standin up tae the backside in snow sometimes cuttin hedges - you know trimmin them up wi a hedge [?]. Rakin them up and burnin them and a that kind o thing - just something to do. On rainy days maybe you'd be inside the barn where there was a lot o cobwebs tae gather up and couple sweepin doon cobwebs. A this sort o thing. Maybe in the stable cleanin harness if it was, you know, very bad. That's the way it started. And then when the Spring o the year cam, you startit harryin the field wi harries. And as a said already, after this sowin seed business stopped, they got this machine, what was ca'd a corn driller. And the spoots was anything between five and six inches apart. Tae start wi it was sort o a coulter, and the grain fell doon in atween this coulter in the ground, you see. And then they got ones wi discs on them. You know, discs, that went round, and it was a bit easier on the horse. There was twelve and fourteen spoots on each - two handles on them and you just put them into the ground. Liftit them to the end and put them in. And your joinins had tae be as if you didn't see them - you know there was just six inches and when you was joinin them again you had to just hae that again.

GW: So once - say you got your harvest in, and a neighbourin farm was still strugglin, would they go and help...

WW: It did happen. Yes it did happen - if they was still strugglin. You know if they didnae hae the staff to do it wi, and he was - the result was bein that he was late in gettin his stuff into the ground, you see, and he was late wi the rest o it. And sometimes you did go and gie him a hand tae help oot at the harvest.

GW: And you'd expect him to do the same if ...

WW: If it happened tae them - you know it all depended on how the weather wis and how quick you could get your stuff into the ground.

GW: And if that happened there was never any payment - it was just charity.

WW: No, no. Money never changed hands at all. Never. Never. No, if you was engaged tae a place, when I startit, it was monthly payment, every 28th o November or May. Every 28th o the month, I should say, sorry. O the month. And that was classed meal day as well - you got your meal that day as well, that did the month. A single man got half a boll o meal which is thirty-five pound; a married man got seventy pound, which is a boll. You called it a boll - it was half a boll a single man. And usually the men got sixteen gills o milk per day. The bothy lads got twelve gills or something like that, per day.

GW: So how many would usually be in a bothy?

WW: ... Well sometimes you know you'd hae two, you hae three, you hae four, sometimes five, sometimes six, depends on the size o the farm, and it was just the same as the horse in the stable, you'd a your own - just yer own bowl, own jug, and a plate and a fork and a knife, and your ain place at the table, yer ain place on the long wooden form there used to be, yer ain place there. A'thing was individual, and if you was the first ... man in the bothy - like say second man, second, third and fourth and a cattle man or whatever there was - you start yer week on pan on Seturday at denner time. It was arranged atween the men in



there - if it was four men - that you would buy the breakfast on Sunday mornin for four men. Which would be two pound o ham, or two pound o sausages, half a pound a piece we used to have (laughs) or eggs you see. And you bought the tea for the rest o the week. You went off the followin Seturday at denner time, emptied the ash place which gathered for a week (laughs) - the fire hardly was ever oot. It was always banked up and the pot and the kettle sat at the side. You took the ashes and swept up and a the rest o it you see, and that was him off. The next boy came on and he had to supply the breakfast, you know that was their routine. You got supplied from the farmer with yer meal, salt, and soap, and yer towels, and yer beddin of course, which the pillow cases was made oot of flour sacks - rough linen flour sacks that they got their flour in, and they made the pillow covers. No sheets, just the bare blankets. The bed was made up o horse mattresses, and what they ca'd a tyke, a caff tyke on the top o them. It was filled up wi chaff off the mill. Clean chaff. By God it was warm, min. Oh aye, and you know after you'd filled it up you were near to the ceilin, you ken, you needit a ladder tae get in, but it soon settled doon. Usually it was just two double beds, one end and a but built onto the steadin or somethin like that. That was the bothy.

GW: So the food, you were talkin about. What would be a typical day after breakfast?

WW: Well - if it was yer week on pan, you made yer break ... you got up and made the porridge, poured it oot, and if there was any left you left it in the pot. In the summer time most men had the cold porridge and a flaggon o milk, maybe wi cream on it. It was great in the summer time. If no, it was brose you got. You made brose for yourself, twa handfie o meal and salt and pepper, hot water and that was it. Guzzle it doon. You was hungry - you wasnie allowed tae eat any mid-yokin atween seven o'clock and twelve you know - most places. You wasnie allowed that.

GW: And then at night, what?

WW: Well, it was just whatever you had - if you had an egg, you know, fair enough. You'd just entice a hen into the stable - leave a wee trickle o corn up to it, an the hen would follow it and lay it doon - but eventually, you know the farmer or farmer's wife eventually got the idea and shut the stable door after the horses were a out, sort o thing. We used to leave them open so's the hens would go in. It was a free range hens at that time. There was ay hens aboot farm steadins. But then, some o the fermers' wives when they kent the eggs was goin missin they used tae plant them. Lay them doon, maybe twa eggs in the corner of the cart shed, or somewhere. You kent fine they were laid. What you did was you liftit a stane, and lashed it doon on tap o them. That seen stopped them plantin eggs - broke them, you see. That's the kind o thing you did. But if you wanted eggs, you just had to go to the farm house and buy them. Maybe you had a bit o sausages or something like this, you know, at nights. But usually it was just plain breid and seerup, a bit o margarine or seerup, or something like that. And you just did yer ain entertainment at night if you wasnie away. You know, a bothy ballad, or a singsong - there was ay somebody could play the melodeon, or



somethin like this, you see. Early tae bed, of course. Nine o'clock, half past nine, so'd you'd get oot in the mornin. The foreman usually rapped on the windae - rapped the boys up, and you had tae go oot sharpish.

GW: So about the ploughin matches ... once a year, was it, every year?

WW: Ay about February, February month that they usually were held. January or February, depends on the weather - sometimes a lot o them was cancelled wi the weather, the hard frost or somethin like that. Usually they came off. And you started preparing that if you wanted to compete - for like groomin and harness and everythin else you had to start aboot six weeks afore the time. Wash the harness o doon and scrub it brown and dye it and beetle it - every night and weekends. You had maybe - wash your horses legs at weekends just to get them kind o freshened up.

GW: And there was special harness used solely for that - they werenae ...

WW: Well a lot o folk had a set o special harness for nothin else but as far as I was concerned it was just what the farmer had, it was called everyday harness, you know, sometimes it was good and you got a wee bit encouraged by some o them but no very much. You know, if you asked [?] if I could get away tae the ploughin match he'd. 'Hoo, d'you no get plenty o ploughin at hame?' You know they grudged this half day, you see. It was usually on a Saturday. But, you know, maist o them was quite reasonable at lettin you off. But if you was a - you know, what you ca'd a fee'd in man at the place and - a lot o places would hae farmers' sons roond aboot you see - they could practise and had a plough o their own on workin days, whereas we had tae dae it on the Saturday afternoon. We didnae get the same privileges and the same help as what they would get, know what I mean. Maybe a Saturday afternoon or something like this. There was only one place I got a bit o encouragement because the horses that I had there was big black geldings and terrible big feet - you know real smart geldings. Well, in a swing ploo you didnae hae a bog wide fur, and the horses wis accustomed tae goin ahind a hunder-and-tenie, which was a wide fur. But he says tae me, he says [ ? ] Just plough every day wi that till they get it. And they took big strides, Gary, you see. Oh, they sain came intae it, sain came intae it. Cause it was a fault if your horse trampit the fur, if you know what I mean. If he nicked it, a bit out o it, you could see it. That was the only place Ah got encouragement.

GW: Where was that?

WW: Balmacoile. I went to Meiklour that year and there was eighty-two pair on one field at a ploughin match.

GW: Eighty-two?

WW: Eighty-two pairs.

GW: Really? So how far afield would they have come from? Quite far, was it?

WW: Oh aye. Oh it was open. The championship, it was open. They used tae come fae away up here, away up further north, away up in Invernesshire, an away down Angus way. There was a man o name o Suttie and a man o name o Haggart, and a Ewan that had a farm at Bankfoot - what competitive it was min, oh! You know it was just one after anither, trying tae beat ane anither. Eventually, if you got the trophy - the championship trophy - within three year,

that wis you out. You couldnie compete again. And that's what they a competed for. But they did get it eventually sometime or ither. It wasnie three successive years, as it sometimes was. It was just, if you got it three times. Big competition. Very big competition. You got half an acre to plough that day - you'd tae plough half an acre. You went in there in the mornin, over an drew your rig - drew the number o the rig that you was goin tae be ploughin - and got startit. After yer feerin was drawn you all went to the highest number tae scale it oot. Feered it then scaled it oot, till you come tae the finishes. And the other chap came up agin your feerin and he did the same, he scaled it oot.

GW: So presumably the farmer who was havin this - whose land it was - would be gettin all this ploughin done for him.

WW: Well he got all that ploughin done but they didnae like it very much, Gary, because there was too much finishins and feerins in it. You know, the days o the binder, when you was cuttin the corn - I dinnae ken if you've ever seen any o them or no - operatin have you?

GW: Ah don't think so, know.

WW: You know the platform, and the flights and the - you know, throwin oot the sheafs. And when they were goin across it, you know, it wasnie handy. Or up and doon the way, cause you know there was a lot o hollows in the field. But they got their ploughed field for nothin, just the same, but a lot o them didnae like it with this, too many feerins and finishes in it.

GW: And they werenae easy sorted, you couldnie...?

WW: Well, eventually it would get levelled oot, but it didnae maitter where it was or what kind o a plough it wis, on a finish you could never level it oot level. You could make a feerin level, but a finish, there was always that hollow in it, cause it was two furs throwin oot the seam. When you filled it in, you filled it in with four furs, the original ploooin, but it still didnae level it oot.

GW: So would the matches be in different places each year?

WW: That year it was at the Hatton o Cargill I'm talkin aboot. Ken, up the Lessendy road - up the Islay. And then some other place, dependin on where you'd get a field big enough. Maybe be in Brig ferm, it could be in Kinclaven ferm, och it was a different places. That was the Meiklour ploughin match. There was one at Strathord, they called it Strathord ploughin match as well. It wasnie sae big. St Martins at Balbeggie. There was one at Auchterarder; Bridge o Earn, you know. It was nice to go and be a spectator and see how, you know, other people did. How they got on, and the style o the fur that they wantit, and one thing or another. But they had tae be packed firm. If you stood on it you didnae hae tae sink in it. It's that tae this day. Had to be firm. Boy could be makin a braw job but when anybody stood on it they went more or less oot o sight.

GW: So who would organise these things, was there a committee?

WW: There was a committee. A committee that organised them. You had tae pay yer entry money which consisted aboot five shillins or somethin like that at that time. Five shillins or ten bob, whatever the case may be.

GW: And then there'd be prizes - what would they be donated ...

WW: Well, you know, they were donated by different firms. A lot o the first prizes, you know, the ploughin would be money. Maybe the champion if he was first would maybe be five pound and the trophy, you see. The next boy would maybe get three pound and right down the scale like that. But they couldnie cover them all. Sometimes it was far too big for tae cover them all. Then you got maybe a ham shank for the feerin and maybe a bicycle lamp or, you know, something like this, for the feerin, and then the straightest, levellest, outs and ins - that was gaen out and in at the end - finishin. Then the horse, it would be the harness and the groomin and the best pair, and you know the best lookin plooman and a this sort o thing. That's the kin o prizes that went.

GW: So you just took your own food with you for the day, did you. There was no ... ?

WW: Well, they used to go around with a tea urn and you got a bridie. A bridie for the competitor and one for one man that was with you. You aye had more than one man there but there only two bridies you got and twa mugs o tea.

GW: So who supplied that?

WW: Well it came off the committee funds.

GW: Right. It's a lot o bridies, eighty-two!

WW: It was. It was either a bridie or a pie. But it had been ordered wi a baker, you see and it was delivered. It was usually hot. Well, no hot, but, you know, warm. And then sometimes, the farmer where the poughin match was held - he would go round with a bottle of whisky, and you'd get a nip. Again, tae the competitor and one man. No tae everybody. Tae one man.

GW: So when did these start dying out ... ?

WW: When the horse - after the tractors came in aboot, you see, the horse just kind o melted away. You know there was nae horse tae do it and no men tae drive the horse, and that was the end o it.

GW: And what stage would that be roughly. When did you first go on to ... ?

WW: The first plooin match I was at was in 1934 and the last een I was at was in 1949. That was at the carse oot there - at Appin oot there.

GW: So were you ever at a lovedarg at all?

WW: Eh?

GW: Were you ever at a lovedarg? Does that name mean anything to you? A lovedarg. It was like ... well, Uncle Dave was telling me about it once. A farmer's wife was left as a widow, and somebody came and ploughed all her land for her one year because there was no-one left to do it. Was you ever ...

WW: Well it must have been a wee place, I suppose, a pendicle or something. I'd never anything to do wi that. No.

GW: No. It doesnie mean anything to you?

WW: No really. No.

Break.

GW: So what fuel was usually used, was it all wood?

WW: Eh?

GW: Was there much coal used, likes o in the bothies?

WW: Oh aye, the bothy lads got their coal as well.



GW: They got that supplied?

WW: They got that supplied. It usually came in on waggons at the station. You'd tae drive up tae the station. But, the big house, they'd get a supply o coal as well you see. But the men - the merried men didnae get their coal. Sometimes they did - it was maybe half a ton every six months they got. That was a they got. If they wantit any more they had tae buy it. Within their bargain you see if you know what I mean. They got a ton o tatties - the merried men got a ton o tatties foreby their - that was their perquisites along wi their meal and their milk. If they didnae want a their meal they took half meal and half flour. Every month. But they got their tatties in November and that had to last them a year. And they've got their coal when they went there at the term for six month - half a ton. If they got coal. Every place didnae supply coal. But the bothy lads aye got it. You know, a cairt load at a time you got. I was at a place doon at Burntisland, New Biggin they called it. And their was - the foreman was married and the second, third and fourth was single. I was third. And you used tae ging fae there tae Cowdenbeath for the bothy coal if it was finished. The second lad, me and the fourth lad took turn aboot goin for it. And it took you - fae seven o'clock in the morning tae one afore you got back. You know it was a six hour journey, there and back, and load some coal and then come back and empty it. It was second grade coal, it wasnie first grade, it was second grade coal. Blastit stoor in it, you know.

GW: And you'd burn sticks as well would you?

WW: Aye, well you had sticks if the fire went out, but as I says it was banked up a the time. You banked it up wi a great big nugget at night and dross roond aboot it and poured water on it. Set yer pot at the side o the fire and the kettle at the other side so it was near boiling in the morning.

GW: So would you go out and cut yer own sticks?

WW: Well you cut yer own sticks if need be, if the fire went out. Some o these farmers' wives - at one place in particular they used to come in wi their milk at eight o'clock at night and there was nobody there and the fire was burnt up, they'd take the coal off it! Burning too much coal! Oh we were tellt that often. Oh aye. You just tellt them that the coal was done, you see, and that was it. Sent away for anither load. Twelve, or fifteen hunderweight wi a horse and cart, the pitheid at that place at Cowdenbeath. Well, Burntisland the place was but you'd tae go tae Cowdenbeath for it. A long trek it was.

GW: That was just wi a horse and cairt?

WW: Aye. Well a double cairt, you know what I mean by a double cairt, wi a saiter on the front. It was a bit hilly so you needit a saiter tae help you up the hills. But you know, that was it.

GW: So the likes o the milk and the eggs and all that, was that sold locally? Would the farmer sell that ... ?

WW: They just kept the cow for the use o their staff - theirsel and their staff. If there was nae a village, you know, sometimes you know the laddies at the school, or lassies, they'd come up tae get their milk at night. You know, they'd maybe - supply their milk, and come and collect it. But it didnae happen very



often. As I said, it was - just kept maybe a couple o cows, or three cows to supply theirself and the staff on the farm. I mean, if you had maybe fower or five married men aboot a place and and they've got sixteen gills o milk per day, it's a lot o milk. But they didnae get it all at the one time, if you know what I mean, Gary. Some o them would get it in the mornin and some would get it at night. They used tae bring their flagon doon and lay it on the, what they called the dripper. A big widden apparatus at the back door o the farm hoose, and lay it on there, and come back at lousin time and pick up their flagon, and awa hame. That's the way it worked.

GW: So who would actually do the milkin, was there ... ?

WW: Well, there was usually a maid at the farms that did it. They did the milkin night and mornin.

GW: Would they stay in the farm house?

WW: They stayed in the farm house. A dairy made or you know a skiffy o some kind that did the chores in the farmhouse and did the milkin. Sometimes it would be maybe the cattleman's wife that would do it, or sometimes maybe it was the grieve's wife that was engaged to do it if there wasnie a maid about the place.

GW: Were they fee'd in the same way as the men?

WW: Yes, the girls on a farm toon was just fee'd the same way as the men was. But they lived in, you see. They got their grub and one thing or another. You know, they had a dress for doin the work in the forenoon and they had a dress for the afternoon which was a black dress and a white pinafour. And a white cap roon the head. That was for the afternoons efter a the work was done. They had to serve the tea at night wi a this dress and one thing or another. Oh aye.

GW: So would there be anyone else in the farmhouse apart from the family and the maid? That's all.

WW: That's all.

GW: No other servants or anything?

WW: No unless there was any visitors or anything. It was usually just the one maid that was there. And maybe just I suppose, the farmer's wife and the maid would do the work between them, maybe the farmer's wife would do the cookin or whatever the case may be. Sometimes the maid would do it. It depends. But they always went away wi their men on market days, the farmer's wife, to dae their shoppin. In the town, the nearest town.

GW: Was there much in the way o transport to get in and out of, say Perth. Did you ever get a trip to - into the town.

WW: There was a lot of [?] horse and carts in these days when there wasnie so much motor lorries on the go, you see, it was all doon at the stations. There was a station into aboot every village at that time, Gary. Whether it be three mile or whether it be a mile. The oats was driven tae the station in bags, pit in the waggon and the coal would be there, and the fertilizer would come into the station. There was a lot o they kind o things daein different things until such times as the lorries came and take over.

GW: So there wasn't anything - like the farmer wouldn't have a wee cart o his own and go into the town with that. It was all done by ...

WW: Well, I don't remember of any farmer gaen tae Perth wi a gig, but I do remember o the minister Mr Meikie who stayed at Kinclaven and he came tae Airtully hall every month wi a gig on a Sunday tae dae the service every month, summer and winter, and he was a big man o six feet six and this poney and gig he had, it was a black one. Well, Mr Cree off the farm, he was an elder o the church, and he stabled his poney till the service was over, and he got his meal afore he went back home. Sittin in the open, and snowin and rain - it was five mile he had to go.

## Appendix 2.C

**Will West**  
**Heartland FM**  
**Pitlochry**  
**10th March 1995**

Interviewers are Duncan McDiarmid and James Robertson.

Talking of farm life in Airtully, early twentieth century.

DM: You had two cows, what were they milked, as well?

WW: That's right.

DM: And did you sell milk?

WW: No. It was needit for the family.

DM: For the family? Was it a large family?

WW: Yes, there wis eleven.

DM: Eleven Wests! Was that including mother and father?

WW: No.[Laughs].

JR: How big was the house, Bill?

WW: It wisnae very big. It wis only a kitchen and a room - a small kitchen and two rooms. That wis the way it wis.

JR: And in one of these rooms, how many people lived - or how many people slept?

WW: Well ye had tae have two beds in it for a start, that wis where a' the bairns slept.

DM: Head to toe?

WW: Head tae toe. But by the time that we grew up and went away out tae work on farms, we couldnie get home at the weekends, because there wis nowhere tae sleep. Until such times as the sanitary inspector came along, and they renovated the whole place and added another room.

DM: So you had three bedrooms by that time?

WW: Three bedrooms.

JR: Were there... how many crofts were there on Airtully?

WW: There'd be six, anyway.

JR: And your father being the grieve, you were - the cream of the .. were you considered slightly grander than everybody else because your father was the grieve?

WW: No, each crofter did their own bit, but some of them wis a wee bit bigger, you understand. And when they were more or less nearin retiring age that wis their hobby - workin this croft. The majority of them, you know they did work on the farm until they became retiring age and then they just kept the croft on and some other buddie stepped into their job on the farm.

DM: And the house, was it thatched in these days?

WW: No. It wis slated.

DM: It was slated? So that was quite an advance presumably from some of the houses. Were there still some thatched there at that time?

WW: There wis two, yes, there wis two. But there wis only one lived in actually...

DM: Tell us a little bit about - in the house at that time what was the cooking facilities like?

WW: Well, it wis just a great big black range.

DM: A cast iron range, was it?

WW: A cast iron range, with all the silver on it. Polished so that you could shave in it.

DM: And whose job wis that?

WW: Who wid it be but mother?

JR: Mother did all the work?

WW: She did a' the cookin and a' the washin in an outside tub. [The water] was in an outside pump, ye'd tae carry water to the outside shed to do a' the washin.

JR: And did you have duties yourself?

WW: We had. We did a' the duties before we went to school and did them when we cam back. And if they werenae did, Lord look ower ye!

JR: And what were they?

WW: Well, ye had tae look after - get the turnips ready for the cows.

DM: That's before you went to school?

WW: Before we went to school.

DM: So "get the turnips ready", what's that, fill the creels?

WW: Ye hashed them wi a hasher.

DM: You hashed them wi a hasher, and..

WW: And sliced them.

DM: And that was for the stirks and..?

WW: Stirks and two cows.

DM: And you filled the baskets for morning and for night, did you?

WW: For dinner time.

DM Oh, for dinner time? There was three feeds a day, then?

WW: If you hashed them too early, they got dried up, the sap went from the turnip, as you know. Right? So you had tae hash them when you came back, for night.

DM: For night as well?

WW: For night, and feed them. And then you hashed them for the morn, but you put a sack over the top to keep the sap in them.

DM: So that's before you went to school. What else did you have to do before you went to school?

WW: The pigs. And the hens.

DM: You fed them?

WW: Fed them. Then we got ready for school. Got wur porridge in the mornin.

DM: So your father was away to work by then?

WW: He was away to his work.



DM: And your mother was looking after everybody and you each had your job. And then where did you go to school then?

WW: Murthly. Walkit two miles every day.

DM: Two miles there and two miles back. So if you daundered on the way back and you were late to feed the pigs and the hens.. Who ruled the rod, then? Was it the mother or the father?

WW: It was mother. Just, you know, we'd change out of whatever clothes we had and put on our old clothes, and get all our jobs done before..

DM: It would be the tackety boots and..

WW: Tackety bits. And a jersey and a pair o troosers.

DM: Right. So that went on for how long?

WW: Until such times that we left the school and then we startit workin on a farm. No option, just into the ferm right away.

DM: And are all the West family scattered?

WW: They're scattered now. There's one in Canada, he was a blacksmith. There's one retired in Bankfoot, there's one retired in Blairgowrie. Eh, there's one in Pitlochry.

JR: Bill, the stock you had on the farm, was that sold or did you slaughter your own and eat it? Was the material there, was it sold or was it for your own use?

WW: It was sold to the grocer who'd come round in the vans. And the stirks was sold in Aberfeldy.

DM: In *these* days they went to Aberfeldy? It was the main centre for young stock, rather than Perth?

WW: When Hunter the coal merchant in Murthly got a lorry, a' the crofters in Airntully got this lorry to take them up tae Aberfeldy tae the sale.

DM: So that's very interesting I'm sure for many of our listeners. At that time even Aberfeldy was a market centre for as far - nearly into Perth?

WW: That's right.

DM: Was that because you were crofters?

WW: I don't know, they seemed to think there was better prices there.

DM: And of course, the farm then was - the Crees had the farm. And was Norman Cree an auctioneer by then?

WW: He was an auctioneer.

DM: So perhaps he had something to do with that?

WW: Well, I suppose it was maybe to help to boost Aberfeldy sale, I don't know. You know, I didnae ken much aboot they things in they days.

DM: That was the Aberfeldy - the famous February sale?

WW: That's right.

JR: And did you ever come through to Aberfeldy then?

WW: No, I was never there until I came and stayed in Aberfeldy.

DM: So did your father have to take a day off from Airntully?

WW: Some o them took a day off, but Mr Cree wasnie very - just, you know, everybody had to do their job and he would let you off occasionally, but it had to be a..

DM: So there were two stirks to be sold every year somewhere, unless you were very unlucky?

WW: That's right.

DM: And what about the cows, how were they replaced? Did you have to buy calves or did you keep stirks?

WW: Well they wis put intae calf, you see. They calfed at different times you understand so that we always had milk. You know a cow goes dry when it goes to a certain age before it calfs. Well the other one's milkin.

DM: So you just had the two cows the whole time?

JR: And who did the milking, Bill?

WW: Ma father did it at night and ma mother did it in the mornins.

JR: And did you make butter or cheese?

WW: Butter. Sold it to the grocer as well.

DM: Who did the churning then?

WW: We did it.

DM: It was an up and down churn was it?

WW: Aye. [laughs].

DM: We're both laughing Bill. Maybe we should explain to the listeners why we're laughing, because sometimes butter has a habit of not just coming in the churn.

WW: Well a churn wis just a square box aboot two and a half feet high with a lid on it and a plunger on it. And the handle came up through the hole and the plunger - you stood and did that till the butter thickened.

DM: And how long did that take? Sometimes five minutes?

WW: No. It would be longer than that. Maybe quarter of an hour, twenty minutes before it would be right. You had tae keep goin. You couldnie stop. You'd just keep goin a' the time.

DM: So it could be quite a boring job?

WW: It wis! When you saw that on the go you tried tae run away, but you had tae run back quicker!

JR: The living room of the house you lived in, that was the kitchen, was it?

WW: That's right. That's where we fed.

JR: And you had a large table? - I'm trying to think what the furnishings would have looked like.

WW: Och well there wasnie much room for furniture. We used tae have the big table with, you know, the flaps on it. You liftit them up when you wis a' tae sit roond the table at one time. And a dresser, and chairs, and one thing or another.

JR: You had eleven or thirteen chairs for the family?

WW: No well - they werenae a' just there at the one time

JR: Your mother fed you in shifts, did she? So what was your average - was this meat and two veggies every day?

WW: Mostly home made soup and puddins. Once a week you got meat and that was on a Sunday. Home baked scones, bannocks, and that sort o thing.

JR: On Sunday you went to church presumably and had a big meal afterwards?

WW: We went tae church and Sunday school every Sunday.

DM: Where was the church, Bill?

WW: There was a wee hall in the village and it was in the parish of Kinclaven. And Mr Reekie, the minister who was a man o six foot seven tall came all weathers in a horse and trap from Kinclaven tae Airttully.

DM: Every Sunday?

WW: Every Sunday.

DM: What time was that - in the morning after he'd done the Kinclaven service?

WW: Well Mr Cree took the Sunday school in the mornin.

DM: Mr Cree did? That was the farmer?

WW: Senior Mr Cree. Mr Reekie did it on Sunday at night. He came for six o'clock.

JR: Did you enjoy Sunday school?

WW: Oh I never enjoyed any school! [Laughs].

JR: And were the sermons interesting...?

WW: We were there because we had to be there. That was a' .. the simple way tae pit it.

JR: And you behaved immaculately did you..?

WW: Ye had tae behave or you got a cuff in the ear.

JR: From the minister or from the chap behind you or..?

WW: Well, Mr Cree could tell you off..

DM: So had you your Sunday boots specially polished?

WW: Aye, oh aye.

JR: Was there any pressure to go to church or was it just part of life that one went?

WW: Just a part o life, really.

JR: But nobody ever said, 'You must go', to anybody?

WW: Well, the parents did. They made us go. We didnae want tae go, but our parents made us go. But you know, at the time you thought that ye was gettin hard done be, but as the years went on and ye met other people ye ken it wis just - the way ye discovert that ye wis doin right.

DM: So in the house that you lived in - you'd no television obviously - no radio either?

WW: No it was the auld squeeze box.

DM: That's what I was going to come to. The squeeze box, and the fiddle?

WW: No, no. Just a melodeon, and the gramophone.

JR: Did you play or did you...?

WW: No, no.

JR: Did you sing.

WW: Well, bothy ballads, but I'm no goin tae sing now! [laughs]

JR: There was a great repertoire of bothy ballads were there, or - did people make them up? Did people make up their own or was this a traditional ..?

WW: Och well it wis more or less the traditional.. things that you'd know and could remember them.

DM: With the bothy ballads - I mean the ones we hear today - are nearly all Aberdonian ones, aren't they? Were there ones about Airttully?

WW: Well there were ones in what you'd say Perthshire, and the Howe o Strathmore, and these places.

DM: And so were there local ones in the Murthly, Stanley area?

WW: Oh aye, aye..

DM: What can you remember - I'm not asking you to sing, Bill - but what can you remember about bothy ballads about Airntully?

WW: Oh but there wis no bothies in Airntully. It wis a' married men.

DM: No but there'd be ferm touns and ...

WW: It was a' married men. Four or five o them.

DM: Would there be bothy ballads on some o the farms?

WW: I never kent onythin aboot bothy ballads until I went away tae the bothy.

DM: Oh I see.

Other Guest: Can I ask what a bothy ballad is?

JR: Bill, explain what a bothy ballad is.

WW: It's just, you know - a bothy ballad's sung by all the bothy men. You know and you used tae dance in the middle o the flair wi your tackity boots.. and that sort o thing. It's maybe no for the like o you hearin some o them! [Laughs]

Other guest: Can I ask what the contents of these songs was?

WW: Well, you know. Bits about the farm town and about horses and one thing or another. That's the way they were made up. And the skiffy which is the maid on the farm. And the farmer heself or the farmer's wife, just bits and pieces added up and made intae a song. They werenae long songs - maybe about three or four verses at the most, ken.

JR: So presumably you went farming after you left school did you if you went into a bothy?

WW: I worked at Airntully first and then I was heaved oot tae the bothy. And I worked on ten different farms durin ma single life.

JR: What sort of things were you doing on these farms?

WW: Well ye had tae start at the bottom. If you wanted tae get up, a wee bit o ambition, ye had tae...

DM: You'll have to explain to our listeners - what's the bottom on a big farm?

WW: The bottom is the orrae work and the loon or the orrae horse - that's the single horse. That's how ye start.

DM: Doing all the horrible jobs...

WW: Then you start to get into the next - maybe the third or the fourth pair- depending on the size o farm. You worked yer way up if you wis ambitious enough to get up to the first pair to lead a' the rest o the men. Fair enough..

JR: And in the bothies what difference in wage was there between the most skilled man and the most unskilled man?

WW: There was never very much - there might be aboot ten shillins - that's fifty pence nowadays - aboot ten shillins between each man.

DM: Per week?

WW: No that was per six months or per year.

DM Well that's why I asked you the question...



WW: Well the difference between a foreman and a second man would maybe be ten shillins..

DM: You left home about when, it would maybe be 1920 something?

WW: 1929 to be right.

DM: And you went to be an orraman, where?

WW: No, a went to drive the second pair on a place.

DM: You went to drive a *second* pair, you startit high up, Bill!

WW: It wisnae a very big place. It only had two and a half pair on it.

DM: What was your wage in 1929?

WW: One pound per week. Twenty six pound in the six month; half ...meal which was thirty-five pound; two pints o milk per day.

JR: Did you feel poor?

WW: No. Never. Never.

DM: Just to take you back, Bill, again. You said something there - your wage was twenty six pound in the six month - and what did you say after that?

WW: Thirty five pound which is half a boll o oatmeal per month and two pints o milk per day.

DM: These were the perquisites..

WW: The perquisites for a single man.

DM: You got the meal for the porridge..

WW: And the brose.

DM: And the brose. Was it brose mostly? Or did it depend how early you got up?

WW: No well when you wis a week on pan you had tae get up first.

DM: When what?

WW: [laughs] When it was your week on the pan - making the porridge..

DM: Right your week on the pan.... now how...?

WW: If there wis two or three in the bothy.. you had one each week making the porridge.

DM: So how many were in the bothies that you were in?

WW: Well, maybe three, two, three, four, depends on the size o place.

DM: These were all single men?

WW: Aye, oh aye.

DM: Now one of you got up and made the brose or the porridge?

WW: Ye made yer own brose. Ye didnae make brose for other folk. It was the porridge you had to make..

DM: Just tell the listeners how you make brose then. Do you still make it?

WW: Oh, sometimes a take a notion and have it at night. At tea time.

DM: Right. How do you make it?

WW: Ye held the bowl in the palm o your hand. If you put yer thumb over the rim o the bowl ye got a rap over .. from a spoon fae somebody else. ..We were clutterin the flair. That was the regulations in the bothy. Hold the bowl in the palm of the hand. Put the meal in wi yer hand ..some salt, some pepper and a bit o margarine. And stirred it with the handle o the spoon - no the bit you supped in, but the handle...

DM: Was it a wooden spoon?

WW: Well, it used tae be wooden caups and horn spoons when I started, but eventually we just went to .. what we're using now.

JR: At the end of your day, what time did you knock off?

WW: Maybe half past five in the winter time and six o'clock...

JR: And what did you do in the bothy with your three or four mates for the rest of the evening until you went to sleep?

WW: Well, you either played cards, or you had a sing song of bothy ballads, or pu' the sweir(?) tree - you know what that is?

JR: No. Explain.

WW: Well it's a strong bit o stick aboot that length. And ye sat down on the floor with your feet up against your opponent and you put the stick down between your toes and pulled, and whoever cam up off the floor first won.

Break.

DM: One of the things that I must ask you, Bill. The enormous skills that were in the old days of horses - the hoeing matches, the ploughing matches - and I know that you got very involved in the ploughing match scene, is that right?

WW: That's right, yes.

DM: What took you into that? Was that just trying to be a better ploughman?

WW: You didnae hae to be a better ploughman, just a wee bit ambitious, to try to get a bit o silver or a Highland Society medal or something like that.

DM: And how many bits of silver did you accumulate?

WW: Well, I only had one bit of silver, but I had a Highland Society medal before you could get a bit o silver. Right?

DM: Right so you got the medal first and you were a champion of champions after?

WW: Well, it was interesting at nights if you were going to compete in everything that was involved - the ploughin, the horse and the harness - you startit six weeks before hand tae clean it all. It had to be a' strippit down, washed - I'm no goin tae tell you the secret bits o it. I'll just tell you the highlights!

DM: The Horseman's word is not going to be divulged today!

WW: No, no. I cannie indulge in that at a'.

DM: So you started six weeks before ...

WW: And wash it, and beetle it.

DM: What?

WW: Wash it and beetle it.

DM: Come on now, what's 'beetle' it?

WW: It's a - you know, a piece o wood, wi a sharp end on it. Well a blunt sharp end. And you had tae rub it on the strap. After you washed it you dyed it before you beetled it. You got the dye in to make it pliable. You didnae put very much polish on it: just beetle it a' the time to get a polish on it.

JR: Did you look on your horses as loved animals or .. it wasn't like a tractor at all?

WW: Oh no no no. You could just get them tae speak tae ye, min.

JR: What kind of horses did you use?

WW: Clydesdales, mostly.

JR: Do you remember any of them by name?

WW: Them all. Every one that a drove, I could tell you their name.

JR: Start at the beginning and let's hear them.

WW: Dick, Muss, Tink, Charlie, Dan, Sport, Jimmy, Nell, Jock, Prince, Punch, Chance, Charlie, Nigger, Punch again, Tip, Nell again, and Jock and Tam.

JR: Which was your favourite?

WW: Punch.

JR: Why?

WW: I don't know. He wis a show beast, pit it that way. He could just walk at the right pace and set heself and he'd good markins, good body, good legs, you know...

Other Guest: You must have cared a lot about them to have remembered their names all this time.

WW: Oh aye. Just loved them.

DM: So when you were controlling them, Punch for instance, Bill, was that by word of mouth, or ...

WW: You know, if you got them from infancy, the cooky wey was the best way.

DM: The cooky way. We're into a terminology that doesn't exist any more.

WW: The cooky wey was being gentle and kind tae it. But there wis other weys o daein it, which I'm no goin tae tell ye again!

DM: And you wouldn't be associated with it any way?

WW: Well I've been associated with it, sometimes ye had tae be, but the best way was the cookie way. They got tae ken ye.

DM: So at a ploughing match, then, a cookie wey horse, that had been brought up that way, did you have to ... had you much to do to control it?

WW: No not really, if you had been workin wi them every day, you know you got them into yer ain way o workin and there was none of this leadin horses or anything in that day at a ploughin match. It was all done wi yer hand at the back and a pair o reigns.

JR: At a ploughing match, Bill, how much is down to the man, and how much is down to the horse? How important is the horse?

WW: It's no so much the horse or the man, it's the plough. The settin o the plough to get the right style o fur, and the right top and the right width and the line that you had on.

JR: So this is setting your plough. You're single furrowing, ... and it depends on how deep or how high the plough is?

WW: Well it's normally about six and a half inches deep and six inches wide.

JR: And where lies the skill in that?

WW: Oh, you need a lot o skill. Need a lot o skill. You know, the sock especially and the couter, it was the sock that turned the fur and it was the couter that was the one that cut it. Well that was the two that made the fur, and the top had to be...

JR: The fur is what?

WW: What turns over. The top of the fur is usually about two and a half inches broad wi a seam in it, you know. That was about it.

JR You look back and you sound as if you loved those days.

WW: Oh yes, I did.

JR: Why did you leave it then?

WW: Because I didnae like the tractors. Simple as that. I've ploughed wi them, drilled wi them, did everything, but sittin on a tractor on a cauld windy day, it is the worst job on earth.

JR: Did the people who you knew who were working in the bothies with you at that time, did they feel the same way as you did? Was there a sort of horror of the tractor when it first came, or were many people quite excited to see them?

WW: If there wis a few pair o horses on a place - maybe say, four pair, that involved a four hunder acre farm, there was a hunder acre to a man and a pair o horse - if they got a tractor, they did awa wi a pair of horse. But that tractor man was never entertained by the rest o the men.

DM: He didn't enter the scene at all.

WW: No. He was never entertained - in the company at all.

JR: Was this because he took away work?

WW: No. Because he left the horses to drive the tractor. Just like that.

DM: So he was an outcast.

WW: He was an outcast.

DM: I mean the thing that I remember in my young days when the tractors came in and each pair of horse went away, that as each pair went off it was virtually accompanied by the burning of a harness.

WW: Well, a lot o them kept it which was a good thing, but a lot o them just throwed it in the midden or burnt it as you say. But that kind o stuff's antique nowadays, ye ken. It's worth a lot o money.

JR : Have you kept any? Have you got any?

WW: No. No now. When I was at the shows I lent it out, and never got it back, a lot o it.

Interview switches to other guest.

JR: What year did you leave agriculture?

WW: Forty seven. Well, my father took a farm at Grandtully there in 1943. And ma father and ma brother worked it. And it was a hunder acre o hill on the place and there was a lot o birch on it. Birch trees. Anderson, the contractor in Dundee, cut the birch doon and needit somebody tae drag it, and that's why I came up tae Aberfeldy district.

JR: You were farming at Stanley during the war?

WW: That's right. Well, it wasnie at Stanley, it was roon aboot Bankfoot and Perth at that time.

JR: Did some of your friends, did they get called up or because agriculture was such an important occupation did they all...



WW: Well they wouldnie take an agricultural worker at all. I was never called or questioned. I wanted tae get away, you know, just to see a bit o life but they wouldn't - entertain me.

DM: What I would really like to ask you Bill, the amazing numbers of conventions there were. You've told us a little about the bothy. In the bothy there were conventions that you had to stick by. And also, in the field, which I know very little about. In the big arable farms they had these - I mean you didn't dare, if you were the third horseman, pass the second one going to the troch. Bill's shaking his head violently!

WW: The first horseman was the first one and you all stayed behind him. He was the man that led ye. Always stayed behind him.

DM: No matter what you were doing?

WW: Never out the stable door till he was out.

DM: He went out first and was in first?

WW: Mmm.

DM: And when you were thinning turnips if you were faster...

WW: He was the man that led them.

DM: And if you could go faster than him, you didn't dare pass him?

WW: I'll tell you a story aboot that. I know a man no so very far fae here that did that. They were thinnin turnips, and he was second pair - second man and he thocht he wis a better man than whit the foreman wis. Out a denner time - at yokin time, after denner, he liftit his hoe and startit thinnin neeps and the foreman just said, och there's no much use in me bein here I'll just go away back up. He wis a married man, a very good steady goin man, but this man thocht he wis better. Course he got the first pair ye see.

DM: So he got the first pair did he? And the other chap just packed in.

WW: Aye, he wis a married man, but the second man wis single.

DM: And in the bothy at night, the bothy was for all the single men?

WW: That's right.

DM: And what sort of conventions were in there then?

WW: Well you just had, you know you had your own place in the bothy, your own bed. Or part o a bed. Yer own kist, that was for your clothes. And you had a mealer as well, what they called a mealer for keeping your meal in and yer bread and yer bowl and that in. Some bothies when I startit there wis no table in them.

DM: You just had yer kist?

WW: You just had yer kist and a'hing wis done - yer bread was cut on yer knee.

DM: So you spread yer bread in your hand?

WW: And just a big black kettle, a big black pot and a big black frying pan. That wis it. You got yer soap and salt and yer towels.

DM: Have you still got yer kist?

WW: Yes.

DM: That'll be worth a bit o money then.

WW: Kind o worm-eatin like me! [laughs] There's another story I'll tell you aboot a grieve that wis on a big place and this foreman mannie was a cautious

kind o a lad. He didnae exert hisel in any way. The grieve mannie wasnie very chuffed aboot him no gettin a move on as the boys ahind was aye up his backside. So he says tae him one day, 'George', he says, 'there's no much room ahint ye but there's an awfy lot o room in front o ye'. That's the kind o thing's it was in they days.

JR: What did you do on your day off, Bill?

WW: You didnae get any days off. If there wis three pair o horse on a place ye had tae have a weekend on every third week. That wis Saturday night and Sunday. Ye didnae get a day off. Never had any holidays - unless Little Dunning, or New Year's day. That was aboot all. Maybe you got an extra day if you was too long a fee. Maybe you was after the term afore you fee'd you got a day.

### **Return Visit**

**17th March 1995**

[Beginning missed]

JR: So three of you were living in the bothy. How many rooms in it?

WW: There was a kitchen - this was a good bothy this - a kitchen, a bedroom and a large sort o sittin room. Good. Very good indeed. The best one a was ever in, I think. Water on site and everything. Toilet on site. Something very unusual in thae days.

JR: And you slept in the same room as your colleagues?

WW: There were two double beds in that bedroom. Two o them slept together and I had a bed on my own.

JR: And where was cooking facilities?

WW: Well, as a said last week, you had yer week - each man had a week what we call 'on pan'. Making the porridge and doing this and makin the tea and supplying the tea for the week and this sort o thing.

JR : And this was on a fire in the bothy?

WW: Just cooked on an open fire in the bothy. The maid used tae come roond in the mornins at five o'clock and [knocks on table]. That wis it, up, and oot tae the stable.

JR: I farmed myself twenty years ago and you had these awful dirty cack-encrusted clothes that you had to put on - your overall. Is that what was waiting for you beside your bed when you get up?

WW: Aye ye just had tae jump intae - no messin - get in and oot as quick as possible.

JR: Before you eat?

WW: Oh aye. You had tae spend half an hour in the stable: feed, muck, groom, water - then back for yer breakfast. Then startin time was seven o'clock. There wis two doors into the stable. The grieve cam in that door, he never stopped, he just spat the orders oot and oot the other een.

JR: Was he a nice chap the grieve?

WW: Oh he was a nice man, but grieves never made themselves popular wi the men. There was always that wee bit o animosity. You know, if he favoured one man a bit.

JR: Ok, so you've done the horses and you've come back in for your breakfast. So one of you is back there cooking the porridge for the morning?

WW: No ye had to make the porridge before you went to the stable in the morning. Ye wasnie due in the stable till half past five. That wis how we got the rap at five o'clock in the morning. For the boy tae get up and get the porridge made...every morning for a week.

JR: So you've done the horses, and you've come back for your porridge. And that's what, a ten minute job, bolt it down and you're out again?

WW: Oh no, no, you just took yer time. Ye had fae six o'clock tae quarter tae seven. It was ten minutes tae seven afore ye went back to the stable. Gave yer horse a dust doon. So ye sat doon, and if you seen him coming in that door, you would stand up as quick as possible. If you were sittin doon he told ye tae get aff yer backside when I'm geein you yer orders.

JR: So you had to stand when he was telling you what to do?

WW: Oh aye, ready tae grab the leather. Get oot tae work as quick as possible.

JR: Really. Ok, so you've had your breakfast, you've been told what to do and you're back in the stable presumably, to get your horse?

WW: Well, it depends what we wis doin, what time o year it was.

JR: What was the busiest time?

WW: Oh I would say the Spring o the year. When you wis pittin the seed in and one thing or another.

JR: Ok, it's now - the 17th of March, you've gone back into the stable to get your horse. What do you do then?

WW: Well, you'd put the leather on, if you was away tae the plough, and you ploughed all day. No break, no break - middle o the yokin - they just detested that.

JR: You went straight on with it?

WW: Till twelve o'clock.

DM: There was no piece time?

WW: No piece time. No break. Just got on wi it. If they seen ye eatin a piece, standin at the end, 'Take yer meals in yer own time, not in my time'.

JR: This was a single horse and a single plough, was it?

WW: No, no. A pair of horse on each plough. Ye had yer own horse, yer own harness, yer own graip, yer own curricomb, yer own brush and a' yer own reigns and that. That wis yours. That wis the implements and the horse that ye had to use.

JR: The two horses you had, at this particular time, what were they called?

WW: Chance and Cherlie.

JR: And what were they like?

WW: They were just...

JR: Big dumb beasts, were they?

WW: They werenie dumb! Anything but dumb. No, no, they were anything but dumb. They were great!

JR: Horses had individual characters, did they, they .. some of the horses were different in character from the others, were they?

WW: Oh aye, aye. Some o them got a bit fiery right enough. You could tell that by their eye.

JR: And what were these two like?

WW: Ah well, they were calm and quite content to do their job.

JR: So you come into the field - how do you transport a plough? Was the plough waiting in the field for you, how did you get it there?

WW: What?

JR: The plough.

WW: You just loused it there the day before and yoked it the next day, and keep goin.

JR: And what size were the fields you were working in?

WW: Oh, anything from say, ten, fifteen, twenty, maybe thirty acre.

JR: Was it not hysterically boring walking up and down behind a horse?

WW: Oh no, ye just whistled, and ye sang as yer ploosle along.

JR: What, plough songs, pop songs, what were you singing then?

WW: Oh I'm no goin tae say what we were singing [laughs]. It was maybe made up just as we were goin.

JR: And you ploughed for how long, up till twelve o'clock?

WW: Up tae ten minutes tae twelve. You got travellin time tae leave the field and get tae the horse troch for twelve o'clock. Strippit the harness off yer horse, fed them and hayed them and went away for yer dinner which was the meal pot again - brose.

JR: This is back to the bothy?

WW: Back to the bothy.

JR: With everybody else?

WW: Everybody else.

JR: And how long did you have?

WW: An hour and a half at denner time in the Spring o the year. And aboot twenty past one you went maybe back to the stable to gie yer horse a rub down wi the brush ready for yokin time again.

DM: And when ye got yer orders in the mornin, then when was that - just at breakfast time?

WW: No, no, at yokin time.

DM: At yokin time?

WW: On the hour, within the hour.

DM: And the griever would come in ...

WW: As I said he would come in that door, and never stop and gan oot that door and just spat the orders as he past. The only time he ever had a word wi you was if it was rainin.

DM: Now if you were furin up tatties or something like that, he'd come in and tell you to go to such and such a field..



WW: Aye, he'd come in and tell ye tae yoke the double dreeler the day and start and dreel that field. Or, go and feer that field o laigh or something like that.

DM: And so how good were these guys at knowing? I mean if he sent you to a field that was maybe half done and he knew that you would be finished that by twelve o'clock perhaps.

WW: Aye well, fair enough. Ye'd just keep goin till ye did it. As long as ye was keepin goin, he didnae bother ye. But there was always someone about a place, Duncan, who had an animosity - a bit o spite at ye - always a dirty trick. Always.

DM: Like what? [laughs]

WW: Well if you was at the double-dealer(?) - you ken what that is..?

DM: Mm- though you'll have to explain for some of our listeners.

WW: Well it had two big wheels on it. And there's a box on it and you filled it with manure and it made two drills, and there was a handle came over the top o the box and that's how you steered it, and your reigns in one hand. And there was a marker on it for puttin yer marker doon. Well, if the boy before was a wee bit jealous, he widnae put the marker doon on the last roond. Ye see, it wasnie marked for the next boy tae take. So he had tae follow the last dreel and dae his ain mark after that. Or, if you went tae yoke a cart - you know the carts usually hung on a cleek - ye just had the horse in a atween the shafts. You would take the lock off the cart, and naturally you had to lift up the trams to get the chains off the cleek - the cart would tip up. Which was a bad thing to frighten a horse.

JR: Why was .. was this because it was a small community...?

WW: Animosity as well. You could aye tell who it was. Oh aye.

DM: So your repost was to do the same to him the next day - to return the compliment?

WW: No no. I never did it. I'd nae reason to dae it. I had it done to me often but I had nae reason to take it out on other people.

JR: After you've had your dinner, you've yoked up again, you're ploughing for the rest of the afternoon, what time do you knock off?

WW: Half past five.

JR: And what's the procedure, then, what do you do?

WW: Well, you go back home and have yer tea, whatever it might be.

JR: You've done the horse beforehand?

WW: Oh yes. Feed and groom them and bed them and everything else. Get them settled down for the night.

JR: Oats do you feed them?

WW: Bruised oats. Molasses, watered doon molasses, maybe once a day. That wis it.

JR: And other people had their own horses and you had...

WW: The foreman always fed the corn. The rest o the boys behind - they had a week aboot o hayin them up in the loft. That wis up the ladder, shoved the hay doon. But the foreman always did the cornin the horse.

JR: And you had your own horse, your colleagues had their own....and was there rivalry between you about the horses?

WW: Aye well, some o them would boast that I had a better horse than you. You know, these were the sorts o things that went on, you see. They used tae try and prove who had the best horse. I know folk - it happened in the Hills o Bendochy. You know where that is?

DM: Coupar Angus?

WW: The foreman, Bob Duncan, was his name. There was an argument among the four pair, who had the best horse. And they were cartin off turnips at the time. Well, prove it! So they loaded their carts, stuck a prap(?) in the back o the wheels, and the wheels was trailin..

DM: So they were jammed, so they wouldn't turn?

WW: They wouldnie turn. By the time they got to the top o the field, that was who had the best pair o horse.

DM: Who was first up?

WW: Duncan. Well, them that could do it, some o them couldnie manage to do it. A sair job that, ye ken, on the iron-shod wheels that wis on the carts!

DM: And was that a pair on that?

WW: A double yoke, aye.

JR: And what happened if you went on to a job, and you were given your two horses and one was absolutely useless. Were you just stuck with it, if you had a bad horse, or were they all good horses?

WW: Well, they werenie all good eens you know, there was whiles we had a bad een. You had tae tie it back and keep the other een forit, sort o thing.

JR: And did you break the horses yourselves?

WW: I've had my session at that as well, no there, no at that place.

JR: And this is, what a year old colt?

WW: Oh no no, they were risin three maybe, risin four, afore they were broken. It didnae do tae break them too young. They never got developed right, matured right if they were broken too young.

JR: And how do you go about breaking a plough horse?

WW: Oh, I cannae tell ye that min!

JR:[laughing] Why not?

WW: [not laughing] Because it's one o these things a horseman keeps tae himself.

JR: And how did you learn it, then, if a horseman keeps it to himself?

WW: Cause I was learned how to dae it, by older men.

JR: And who are you going to pass it on to though?

WW: Well, I've nobody to pass it on to, but I've intentions o writin it on a letter and givin it to my son to keep. I've only the one son, who's a bank manager in Dundee.

JR: And he ought to know how to break a plough horse, course he should. Ok, so you've put your horse to bed, what do you do with the rest of your day. It's now, what, six, six thirty...?

WW: Well, you went home to the bothy and ye had yer tea whatever it might be - maybe skirlie or fried onions or bread and cheese and a mug a tea, And you sat

on a big long form, you know, a big long wooden form. You sat there and had a smoke and you maybe had a wash and you know take the heavy boots off.

JR: Get the melodeon out?

WW: Get the melodeon out if you werenae too tired.

JR: And in bothy, where you had three other people living there with you, was that the only bothy on the farm or...?

WW: Only one bothy on each farm.

JR: And three was about the average number of...

WW: Aye, three, four. Och, there's been places wi six, seven and eicht in the bothy, you ken, these places, the further east ye get. Like the Mains o Glamis, there was eicht pair o horse on it at one time.

JR: Really? And did you know the people who worked on neighbouring farms?

WW: Oh aye. How you got to know them, the steam mill used tae come in about. The travelling mill. And it would be - this place I was on - maybe a day's thrashin. Yer neebor would have a day's thrashin, and you would have to go there to the mill. And you'd maybe go to three farms roon about the area to help oot cause they were helpin you oot. And it was a good time at that time, because the bothy lads got their grub in the hoose. If you was three or four days carryin grain - corn, a hunderweight and a half; barley two hunderweight; wheat, two and a quarter, carryin on yer back tae the shed or up the stair or wherever it was tae go. And it was gey hard work!

JR: I'm jolly sure it was. Yes, I can imagine the dust, and the husks...

WW: You'll hae an idea how we ate so much meal.

DM: And some o the granary stairs were pretty...

WW: Oh I've seen them (?) up, Duncan. You know, wi the weight. How they did that was for loadin them onto the lorries or horse carts to drive them to the station. That's how they got them up above.

DM: When you started, when you were actually selling grain off the farm, were they carted to the station with a horse and cart? They didn't have a lorry coming in about?

WW: There wasnie many lorries in these days anyway, Duncan. It depends on how far ye was fae the station.

Break for music.

JR: Bill, we were talking about your days in bothies before the war. What sort of nasty things happened? Were there any disasters or anything like that?

WW: Och aye, you had disasters right enough. Aboot May month, before the may term, you used tae empty all the cattle courts o dung and put them in a midden at the top o a field. And the midden was made so that the horse and cart went up the midden. And many's the one went over the side, upside doon, if it went too near the side.

JR: That must have been utterly disastrous, was it?

WW: Sometimes they got their neck broken or a leg broken, or something like this.



JR: And how do you cope with a ton's weight of dead cart horse that's sitting beside a midden?

WW: Well you had to do yer best. You had to loosen it all off afore it could rise up. Maybe cut some o the straps to get them off and this sort o thing.

JR: And the vet would come out?

WW: Oh no, no. No unless it was seriously injured, like a broken leg or something and it had to be destroyed, you see. But I never experienced anything like that you see, no that anyway. I've experienced other things wi a horse.

JR: What other horrors?

WW: Well, it wasnie a Clydesdale, it was a blinkin Belgian. Two o them at this place. A pair o them.

DM: And were they fairly sceery, Bill.

WW: Well, they were awfy sceery: awfy hard in the heid. You know, they'd take an awfy haudin. I was sowin corn wi the driller one day, and they were fresh, you know, just mad. Loused at denner time at the middle o the field - it was a long field - I jumped on the back, and they gave one squeel and left me sittin in the middle o the field! [laughs]. They ran home right enough, but ye dinnae like these things, cause these kind o things spread to other people and they get to hear about it!

JR: And you would have looked a fool?

WW: I would have looked a fool, right enough. I didnae like it. But it did happen - oh it happened to mair than me manys a time.

JR: These days, everybody knows tractors are dangerous, and they can overturn and squash you if you don't have a decent safety cap. Were you conscious - were horses dangerous as well?

WW: No, they werenae really. It was - if it was a run away, or anything like that - it did happen, right enough, but it was a sceery - a bit nervous at times. If you went away to the station for coal or fertiliser or anything like that and they didnae like the trains, you had to hold it, until such times as .... you was asked what you were doin by the time you got back home again.

JR: And after..or it may have been while you were still farming; you became a judge in ploughing matches, didn't you.

WW: Well, that was after I came back up here again. I didn't do it in my young day.

JR: What made you a judge, an expert: you'd done it so much that you knew...?

WW: Well, they say that you cannae judge plooin until you have the Highland Society medal.

JR: And you have it?

WW: Oh aye, aye.

DM: Where did you win that, Bill?

WW: Strathord.

DM: Strathord?

JR: And how do you win that: how do you get a Highland Society medal?

WW: Well, the ploughman just judged it the best...

JR: This was a competition you won and got the medal for it?



WW: There was usually three classes: the champions, the ordinary class and the boys, you know the laddies. And in the ordinary class you had to plough there until you got the Highland Society Medal, and then you were the champion. And if you won the Highland Society medal this Saturday, and ye was goin to another match the next Saturday, you had to go into the champions.

DM: So how many, in these days, what year was that and how many competitors would there have been at ploughing matches?

WW: Well Strathord, there would maybe be anythin fae twenty-five tae thirty pair o horses in one field. But the biggest ploughin match I was ever at was at Meiklour and there was fifty-six pair in the field that day.

JR: Good Lord! Were you judging that day?

WW: Oh no, no. I was compeetin. That was in 1946.

DM: Who won the medal that day, do you remember?

WW: I cannae remember.

JR: How well did you do.

WW: I was only second.

JR: Out of fifty. That's an amazing achievement. And this is in a ten, fifteen, twenty acre field with fifty pairs of horses working simultaneously?

WW: Bigger than that you see, each rig was - ye had tae plough half an acre. That was your day's work: half an acre. But there was a lot of it wasted, because if there was a long field, there was a mid end rig in it, you know, to gie you room to turn at the end..

JR: And I'm a tourist, and I've turned up at a ploughing match, and you're telling me what makes a good plough, what makes a champion ploughman...

WW: Oh, they'll no tell ye. Ye neednie bother goin and askin them, they'll no tell ye!

JR: Why not?

WW: Well, why should they, you'll just turn round to the competitor and tell them 'you're gettin the first prize'. Oh no, they'll no tell ye. Never knew what ye was goin tae get until the prize was shouted out at night.

JR: Mmm. What are you looking for though in a ..

WW: Well, in a swing plough, as I said last week, six inches, six and a half deep; six inch wide, and well tweeled, you know, no showin grass or anything like that. And sittin straight up. And a line that you could - wi a rope.

DM: Dead straight?

WW: Dead straight. Well packed together.

JR: And how much of that is the horses, and how much of it is you, who've made that..?

WW: Well just team work, I would say. If you had a good pair o horse, and a good workin plough, and it was up to the man to hold it. Different ways o holdin it, you know. A big man, like a big stoot man, maybe six feet, and he'd a lot o weight, the plough was low and he was bent a' the time, he'd be leanin on the plough, leanin on the stilts, which was a bad thing. The best way to work them, I found, was to carry them a bit. You know, just carry - keep the weight up. And always walk in the fur behind the plough.

JR: Was there a lot of rivalry between...?

WW: Oh aye, aye. Very much so.

JR: Really. And who were the great names? Can you remember any of the great names?

WW: Aye. Haggart o Tealin; Suttie o Tealin; Albert Ewan(?); eh, och..

JR: Were these old men who had got expert over the years..?

WW: I knew a farmer, in thae days, he'd be ploughin wi the swing ploo, and he'd cut a fur aboot maybe two feet long, or something like that, and take it home at night, and put it on the table or whatever the case may be and judge it. And he'd size it up, to see what it was goin to need, maybe a wee bit more thraip(?) or maybe a wee bit deeper, or something like that... don't show too much mould, don't show too much culter face on it, just hae it sittin there, perfect.

DM: So he took the section of the ploughing home and from that he deduced how much he needed...?

WW: How much adjustment he would need the next day if it was gettin near ploughin match time.

DM: Now explain, what's a swing plough?

WW: Well, as far as I'm led tae believe, Duncan, it was called a swing because it was done at Kinrossie. And they hung it up on a hook, on the middle o the plough, and it balanced there. That's why they called it a swing plough.

DM: Because it was perfect balance?

WW: Because it was perfect balance. And there was a' the different names o the ploughs, you see. There was Cameron, Halley, Oliver, and all that sort o thing.

DM: What was the most successful plough?

WW: Halley and the Cameron was the best workin plough.

DM: For ploughing matches? And were all these ploughing matches - was it always out of grass or lea?

WW: Always grass, yes, no stubble, always grass. Maybe two or three year old grass.

JR: When did you last see horses used in a ploughing match? Have seen these almost toy matches they have these days?

WW: Oh, maybe aboot two or three month ago, just.

JR: And how good are the guys who are using horses now?

WW: They're plooin in stubble, no plooin in lea. When you're ploughin in stubble its free and you've got to take a bigger fur afore it will turn it, mun! It's just - nae use. It doesnie appeal to me at a'. It's just - it's no ploughin just, that's a' there is aboot it!

## Appendix 2.D

### Interview with John Fisher Glenlyon SA 1988.20

GW: So where was it you were born, John?

JF: Fortingall

GW: You were born in Fortingall? What year was that?

JF: 1903.

GW: 1903. And were you born into a farming family - a farming background?

JF: Yes, aye aye. Well my grandfather, he was in farming and then he went into contracting again.

GW: So was that sheep or was it mixed farming?

JF: Mixed farming and then we went to the - we took the farm in Tynayare in 1914, you see. So we just had a sort o mixed farm, maybe twelve cows and we let the winterin you see - we kept sheep but we let the winterin. It was very poor prices in these days. I sold a tin of potatoes through a two inch riddle for a shilling a hunderweight. Grain a quarter - I don't know if you know what a quarter is, a quarter of corn, ... it's about a hunderweight and a half, I think. We were getting seventeen shillings for that. That was away in 1932 - that was ... between the two wars. During the war prices shot up of course, it didnae matter what you [quote?] you'd sell at a profit but that only lasted a year or two. Folk that had big farms and a lot o sheep well they came out alright. But if you hadn't a big handling you didn't last long enough to make the money, and then places just collapsed after the peace came.

GW: When you were a wee laddie on the farm you'd be helping out all the time, were you?

JF: Oh aye.

GW: What sort of things did you have to do?

JF: Och well I was thinnin turnips and shawin turnips and helpin with the hay and that sort o thing, you know it was all handwork there was no mechanical machines an all that ... And we cut all the corn by machines and tied it by hand, nowadays they've binders but we had no binders. We used to have tinkers, we employed a lot of tinkers. They got about - they didnae get very much money - two bob a day or something.

GW: What size of farm was it - how many worked on it?

JF: There was only my uncle and myself and my grandfather - he was an old man, of course, that was only ... we'd about seventy acres and a wee bit o rough grazing. It wasn't a very big farm.

GW: You didn't winter the sheep - you put them down ...

JF: We wintered other people's sheep, every year ... We got them in ... October, first o October and they went away at the end o April, you see. We couldn't have enough grass for tae keep them all year. We wintered about eighty.



GW: Did you have many yourself - many of your own sheep?

JF: Just a dozen, that was all. We had twenty lambs oot o twelve sheep - we had eight pair o twins and four singles - that was pretty good. We were feeding them a lot you see. I enjoyed the life - we had no money but very enjoyable life. But everything was done by hand, you know, rakes, hand raking and that. There was no machinery at all. Ploughin - and I ploughed, och I've been at two ploughin matches - twenty two ploughs, and I got seventh, twice.

GW: Where was that?

JF: Well, there was one down near Aberfeldy and the other was in Fortingall. There was a ploughin match every year. I got first for groomin and second for harness that year. And I got twenty two shillings for the prize for the groomin which was a lot o money in these days. The horses - good for the chaps like that cause they cleaned the harness and groomed the horses, you know they were all washed and everything.

GW: Were they your own horses?

JF: Yea, own horses. You were lucky if you got a nice pair for the plough, cause some o them werenae very good, pulling away - it was hard work these ploughing matches. I never got a medal or anything like that. I was seventh. Out o twenty one ploughs I was seventh. So I wasn't too bad.

GW: Not bad at all. So who organised these things, was there committees, or..?

JF: Committees, yes just the same - committees and they were all, they ran concerts and things like that to get funds you see. And there was prizes given by all the shopkeepers in Aberfeldy and they gave a prize. There was money too, but mostly prizes, just. So that was how it was run. There was a champion class and a small class, but you hadn't a big bit to plough. Just so many yards ye got, ye see. Well, there'd be a fair bit - but a hell o a work. There was all this, feerings, making a start to it, and all done by hand. And gadsmen, you had gadsmen and they were men who were keepin ye right. And then ye had - it could be snowing. I've seen me out ploughing at one ploughin match at the beginning o March and there was big fall o snow came down and you couldnie see the ploughin hardly.

GW: What exactly were they lookin for, was it the straightness...?

JF: Aye, aye and the ploughs you see there was great bloody art on this plough. The socks on the ploughs. Well there was this man down near Aberfeldy and he had a plough and seven socks he had for it. And special ones that he gave to his sons and that and they all won medals, it was a famous plough. And every farmer, big farmer, had a plough just for ploughin matches. And the like of Dewars in Keltneyburn, they were the blacksmith, they made a plough and it was [clair?] I don't know how they managed to make it [clair?] - shining. Well my cousin he was learnin to be a blacksmith with them, and he got the medal with that plough. The Clair plough they called it. And famous names o ploughs too. There was some great makes o ploughs. But I had a very good plough but it wouldn't work in - it was alright in some soils. I was at home with it and it was doin beautiful. But it was sandy soil. But when I went doon to this other place - tough, gravelly stuff - it was no use. You need special socks. And you had a



these men that was settin the ploughs too. You werenae settin them, it was other men that wis settin it for ye. Really a performance, that's what it was. And ye hadn't much to plough. About a quarter o an acre, I would think, maybe less than that.

GW: So this took place every year did they?

JF: Every year..

GW: Were they always on the same ground?

JF: No, different farms. It was a funny thing, you see. Finishes. A lot o finishes. A lot o people didn't want it, you see. Feerings - what you called feerings, where you started. Well you had that feering and the man who was on the other side, he had that feering and maybe he would come down and maybe he wouldn't be very good and put the thing over the top and you'd have to go and [clampit?] back his fur. Depending who you had next to ye. When you had twenty quarters - what's that?

GW: About five acre?

JF: Aye that's about it. Well I think in the champion class, you needit a field about eight acres, anyway to hold this ploughing match.

GW: So this was just normal land that they'd be using after?

JF: Oh aye, they used that for puttin corn in the next year. The thing about it was there was picnics and all that and baskets of food and ye'd the cart down with the plough and everything at the end. And spectators there too. But I mean it was rather an exciting day and then the prizes - that was at night, you see. You'd all gather round to see the prizes, the prize giving. It was a very good thing for the young chaps to make them interested to keep their horses groomed and - that was more the point it was for.

GW: So the farmer who was gettin his field ploughed ...

JF: He got it done for nothing. It didnae cost him anything. But only - there wis a lot o finishes and the bloody funny thing about it was when they came to the end o the thing, maybe the lad that didn't get a prize - the crop was just as good in it as the one who got the prize! I noticed that - it was aye on a Saturday and on the Sunday there'd be crowds down looking at it. And it'd depend how firm it was you see. If the plough was turning it right. So it was a gamble the whole thing. So it was a great thing. The horses never got a lie down the night before a ploughing match. You had them decorated you see. Tails and - Oh bloody great, it was a great bloody show. And you'll have seen them lately in Aberfeldy that way - Derculich - with these beautiful horses and harness. And every farm had a set o ploughin match harness. I've seen one set sold there it made twenty-five pound. Good God, it was the facings and all that you know. It was a bargain ... You used a bottle for polishing it - you could put your hand on the collar and it wouldn't make a mark on the collar.

GW: A lot of work involved, right enough.

JF: Oh, you scrubbed it all first. And you started about six weeks, that harness that you were using was never used for anything else, but ploughing matches. A lot o ... that harness was borrowed from anither place you see. A lot o the big farmers had their own harness but a lot o the people hadn't.

GW: So you just borrowed from other areas..

JF: Aye borrowed it from other areas..

GW: You didn't have to pay for it. That was just ...

JF: Aye, they just gave you that. And chains and that - a the chains was polished and clear. Ye had them in a bag wi paper and a string on it and every now and again at night and that you would get this bag and rattle it. And these chains were absolutely shinin. And the hems were shining. Oh it was marvelous turn out though, wasn't it?

GW: Oh aye. So there'd be food laid on, would there, for this?

JF: Oh aye, bloody baskets o food out. Everyone had their own food and that - and drink too. Not an awful lot o drink of course. The gadsmen an that, some o them were havin it alright.

GW: But the farmer's wife who had it - she didn't lay on the food for everybody, they all took their own?

JF: No, no. The farmer's wife very often presented the prize, the prizes and ... There are ploughin matches yet to this day, but mainly wi tractors now. You know that yourself. But they're not so ... I reckon the tractors are not so interesting as the horses were. Lovely to see them, these horses. And horses' legs, feet and a that groomed and - I was gilliein and I had army officers out with me and they come over every night before the ploughin match and groomed the horses - they knew how tae - och they'd somethin to do with horses. Their coats just were shinin. And then paraffin on them and then there was rugs on them and I took them down this day, the horses down, and I heard the judges say - one judge to the other - I've seen horses clean and that but I've never seen anythin like this. And I knew fine I had the prize then. And when you took the sheet of them there wis just a gloss on their back. And legs are all washed and oh - I enjoyed that, very interestin indeed.

GW: Does the name lovedarg mean anythin to you?

JF: Lovedarg. Well a lovedarg is - that's different from a ploughin match. Say you took a farm over and you had no equipment yourself - you'd just put in to this farm. All the neighbours and that would come and plough the ground for ye. And that's what ye call a lovedarg. But a ploughin match ...

GW: Did you see that happen around here?

JF: Oh yea. When we went into Tynayare in 1914 we had no horses and the neighbours all came, two pair from some farms and one pair - I think there was seventeen pair o horses came. And they ploughed the whole bloody lot. The redland and the lea and the stubble, they did a the ploughin in one day. Course they werenae like ploughin matches. They werenae wastin time in the finish or the feerin or anythin, you know. Takin a bigger fur too.

GW: Did they just volunteer to do that. You didn't ask ... it was just accepted..?

JF: No, a lovedarg. That was tae help ye start you see. Till ye got organised. It was great that altogether. It was kindness in itself. And then..of course, there was clippins and gatherins and I was just helpin the neighbours too. I did a lot o clippin the sheep, you see. I clipped with both hands. And I was clippin aboot -

oh, I wasnae the best clipper in the country but I was among the top ones. And I'd get a lot o offers to go and - I would get paid sometimes too. No a lot but ...

GW: So how did that work. If your farm was clippin, all the neighbours would come and help ye, is that right?

JF: That's right up to an area - a certain area and of course a lot o them had sheep and the sheep were wanderin onto their ground and that and they all worked together and got their sheep back that day. This farmer would maybe gather forty or fifty sheep belongin to other farmers. And they would be there and get their sheep at night, you see. And they worked - they worked together. Oh - all hand work, you know, all hand shearing.

GW: But there was no payment involved, it was just you come and help us and

...

JF: No, no payment. Great bloody feeds and that. Food was excellent. Everyone competin against the other to see who could put up the best dinner for the men (laughs).

GW: So how many would be workin at once?

JF: Well maybe about, sixteen clippers. A total of about thirty maybe.

GW: And you'd have to supply the food for all o them, would you?

JF: Yes, aye the farmer had to supply the food. And he got a his sheep done. It was only one meal they had to supply because the folk that was out gatherin - I was gatherin and you'd go out.. maybe leavin here two o'clock in the mornin. Half past two maybe, we'd leave. Come up here and be up here just at daylight, you see. And you'd get the sheep in - we'd be in the fank with the sheep about six o'clock in the morning. And then we got our breakfast.

GW: So you just gathered the ones - from your own farm that were goin to be clipped that day.

JF: Aye but there was other stray sheep comin in you know. Stragglers as they call them. ... Then you see, that was that - breakfast, excellent breakfast. When I went to Tynayare first I used to take the breakfast up before I started clippin. And then there was a tea came up again about ten o'clock and then when you were finished well - there was fifteen, sixteen clippers they werenae all - they'd do the clippin in two hours. And the thing was we - you got down to the house again -well, up in the fank you got a dram wi the ten o'clock tea, he went round and the man gave everybody a dram. And then when you came down for your dinner there was a dram on the table for everybody. But you were eatin a the time. Bloody great! (laughs). I thought so anyway. I loved it. I loved the thing. Och I used tae go to about - twenty five, maybe, clippins in a year.

GW: In a year?

JF: Aye.

GW: That's all in the local area?

JF: All round about there, aye. I was a good clipper - that's why I was asked. Clipped with both hands, you see. On the ground. I clipped on the ground. No stool. A lot o them clipped on stools - sat on a stool, and tied the sheep's legs. And my God it was more comfortable, the ground was hard on yer back you know.



GW: But it would be quicker without all that?

JF: Aye, it was a modern thing the ground clippin. It was all done by sittin on a stool. And a man was crockin. What you call crockers. They took the sheep out o the fank, you see and turned them up on the stool and you sat there. And a bit rope and tied its legs, and you were lying back there. But on the ground you see you were far more mobile you see. You could clip far quicker on the ground. Oh aye.

GW: So how was it organised - where you went and when, was there set patterns each year as to which farms you went to which day ...?

JF: Aye, well most o them just had the same dates. But the whole thing could go wrong if it was a wet day, mist or anything like that they couldn't gather. And that ... upset the whole programme. We had to go back - and I've seen men - this man we went back so far that this man was first but he had to wait till his turn came and it went round again before he got into it you see. Well you see many's the time it was that wet that they went wrong, you see. You couldn't clip and you couldn't gather on these hills if there was mist, you see.

GW: But you couldn't clip them if it was wet?

JF: No no. Well nowadays they've big sheds you see that they could put them in but in these days there was no sheds. It was upon the hill side.

GW: So each farmer had his own mark, did he? Each shepherd - on the sheep?

JF: Oh yes they had lugmarks, you see, and some o them brands on the horn. They'd irons that they - when they were hogs, and they stamped the - a C for Croftgarrow or anything like that, and there was a letter and a number behind it. And that was all put on the horn. And then a lot o them had their ears cut you see. A clip off the ear or a slice on the left. A lot o them did it by the horn. Brands, you'd different irons, for every different year. It was all done scientifically, there's no doubt about it, I think. Everything had to be kept - they know the age of the sheep and that, you see. They'd them all branded and marked. They probably kept them five years and then put them away. And then got another year, again, another date on the horn. And then it would be five years from now before another sheep would be sold. And they just looked on their horns every year. Mostly on the ears too. There were no clips - just cut the point o the ear and slit the ear and God knows - all the different marks in the ears.

GW: And what happened to the wool once it was clipped?

JF: Oh the wool was sold. You got bags to hold about forty-five fleeces. One bag. And there was two sticks up at the fank, and you'd hang the bag on the rope you see. And you'd put a stone in the corner o the bag, and you'd hang the bag on this sticks. And as the clipping was going on there was a man in the bag, he went inside. He'd maybe have half a dozen fleeces and then he went inside the bag, trampin it, you see. And it'd take about forty-eight fleeces. And when that was full he had a needle and that and sewed it and that was the bag ready for - well it was a cart or something there to take the bags down. You'd maybe get about sixteen bags o wool - maybe eight bags off one clippin - aye about that. Well, depends on the size o the farm, of course, and then the wool was sold. And



these brokers, wool brokers, they came round - travellers - and there'd be a big lorry would come from Glasgow or somewhere and take a load o that wool away to the factories to make carpets, I think, mostly out o it.

GW: And it was just the farmer who got the profits, there was no money involved for the other ones?

JF: No. Of course the wool brokers they got a share out o it, you know. But that was the way it went. And if a slump came in the wool then maybe they'd have to hold it a bit, you see. Wool used to be quite expensive in the old days.

GW: So the sheep would be dipped as well, would they, at that point?

JF: Eh, no at that point - the first clipping would be about June. And the lambs were all dressed that day. The lambs, they were dressed - castrated as you would say - that clipping in June. And the next clipping, it was the milk yowes..the yowes that had lambs were clipped. You didn't clip all the sheep the first clipping, you only clipped the young hoggs, the last year's lambs, and the sheep that hadn't lambs, you clipped them. And then the next clipping again all the hoggs, the ones that were castrated you know at the first clipping - they were dipped and the [auld?] stock ... that had no lambs, all that stuff was dipped. But not the mothers of the lambs - they were clipped that day. And then the next ... gathering was speaning the lambs, that was taking the lambs off the yowes. You had to keep them off for about three weeks that they would go off the sheep. And they were all dipped, the whole stock again.

GW: And when was that?

JF: That would be October. And of course now they've two compulsory dippins. It's official now you see. They've got scab. There were a lot o sheep on these big places there and they weren't gatherin them in you see. And there'd be some o them wi three fleeces on and they'd never been clipped. And of course what happened was that scab broke out - what they called scab, this disease, and the sheep were itchy and all the fleeces, the wool would come off their backs and a hell o mess. So they had to gather all the sheep off the hills by the Ministry of .. Board of Agriculture made a rule and it was a police business again. It was absolutely official dippins. And you had to sign a form you see. And you had to notify the police when you were going to dip and there would always be a policeman there to see that it was done properly. That was to get rid o the - in fact this North side here, it's a wild country area, there was six sheep they couldn't get. The deer were there - the deer didn't take scab - and there were six sheep. And they were that bloody wild that they were going with the deer and that and they had to shoot them wi rifles. They had to get these sheep. There was three or four fleeces on them. And they were careless, you see, it was absolutely careless. And the dips weren't very brilliant in these days. Some o them hot dips and that. Now they dip much more - well it's much better dip now, and it seems to keep the scab down. But if you didn't dip these sheep you would have scab, there's no doubt about it. And clip them too you see.

GW: Was there much help - between estates - was there much - between farms - was there much coming and going?

JF: Oh, well the laird who owned the estate you see. And there was a factor also. And if you were pushed - say you had the big thrashin mill comin in - it used to be a steam - a tractor engine that drove the mill - and then they got tractors in after that. But these mills you see - they'd no mills on the farms - and these mills would come in for two days maybe to a farm. And you mobilised all the labour you could get, and got in touch with the factor and he would lend you maybe three or four foresters tae help ye out, you see. And it was all done like that. And the tenant farmer was very well off by the laird. He made nothing of it, cause all his drains and all that he got them done for him in his rent. So the laird didn't make one penny off the rent. It was all put out in labour you see. Very difficult. But very helpful. There was more neighbourliness in these days than what there is now. There wasn't so much - folk weren't livin just for money entirely. It was more community spirit, you know, which you don't get nowadays. Money's done all that out. ... Most things, potato lifting, there was four farms and the biggest farmer maybe the man who owned the digger he got the choice o the first date. Well you went and you helped him, you see, and this digger goin and there'd be two would go from us and four and six and - some tinks there as well - but mostly, big organisation. You'd lift an acre in a day. And I always was at the pit, I never ... and two of us at the pit puttin earth on the potatoes and bracken and straw and that kept us goin. Rather interestin too.

GW: So you would do that on a neighbourin farm and ...

JF: Oh yes, three or four farms we worked in and we all worked together.

GW: So you just went round each farm in turn?

JF: That's it and you couldn't cope with it if you were at it on yer own. Och it'd be- and then there was a man had the digger you see. Horses pullin it of course.

GW: So there was no money involved in that. It was just reciprocal?

JF: No money. Just the change o labour you know. There was an awful lot o that happened in these days.

GW: Was there? What other things can you think of?

JF: Well, even haystacks ... You made these coils o hay out in the field and then ..we hadn't got a racklifter but Culdermore had one and Croftgarrow had one and they would have two racklifters and they would put in nearly all our hay in one day, you see. Where as if we were workin away at it it would be hopeless. And that went on and nearly everything on the farm. Neighbourliness. It was a great thing, you know. We lost that. We lost that wi money. Of course machines have killed it, you know. No doubt about that. It was all - there was a few binders about, but at one time there was no binders in the country at all. It was all scythes they did it with. There was no machines either.

GW: Do you remember workin with scythes?

JF: Och God aye. I worked with the scythe. And in fact there used to be maybe in the old days before this machine came in, two horses pullin it you know, and one horse ones too - my grandfather worked the first machine that came to Glenlyon. These things were modern, but then the binder came in after that. The machine - but before that it was scythes - big blades on the scythes. Och, ... and they were great artists with this what you call a straich. You had a stone for

sharpenin the scythe, but you finished it off with this thing, straich they called it, it was butter and tar and a that and that finished the thing ... it was seven men went out this day. They were goin round the country, they from Aberdeenshire I think. Class men. They would take about seven feet a swipe, you know. Big long scythe. Well seven o them in a row. They'd go to different farms, one day here and cut all the hay, and then move on to the - well if they didn't want it all cut they'd come back again. That's the way they did it. These were contractors.

GW: So you would just pay them ...?

JF: They were paid so much a day. They werenae makin a big pay.

GW: So the likes of the tinkers when they came ...

JF: The tinkers got a lot o work. You paid them ... we paid them - we had no binder you see - we employed maybe six tinkers, and there was mysel. And my uncle he was on the machine and you needit two men, one drivin the horse and the other sittin we a rake puttin off the sheaves, you know. You never seen one o them did ye?

GW: No I don't think I did.

JF: No, well you see there was a foot on the thing and then you put it off and then put your foot down and there was an art in it and then on and - we only cut one way you see, one side, and by God, you could cut a lot in a day too. You'd eight lifters and you kept the machine goin, and maybe tying twenty-two sheaves, that's about the limit. And there was an art in it. Tying, but of course there was no string, binder twine or anything needit, you see. You just did wi a band when it was left in the ground. There was an art in it. Very clever.

GW: So did it take a long time to get trained to do that sort of thing?

JF: Course it did, yea. The tinks wouldn't take their ... I had to gather the same amount and then, shawin - an acre - we gave them a pound for an acre, well, a lot o work that. A pound for an acre shawin turnips. We gave the man a pound, and then I mangaged tae shaw a the rest. We had about four and a half acres wi turnips... Well you see my uncle was cartin them in - he would take a turn about wi the horses, but the thing about it was that tinker, we'd give him an acre, you see, and then I would start shawin as well. Well my uncle couldn't catch up with me again. I'd keep in front of him all the time again that way, that lift. Some years we just left them in the ground and furred them up but usually we shawed them all. But och, they don't grow turnips at all now. And you see they've a thing for sewing the turnips, you don't need to thin them. It was a tedious job that.

GW: I'll bet, aye. So the likes o gettin in the hay. After you had got all yours in and say a neighbour still had to get some o his in ...

JF: We went to him next, aye. Well, bloody wind, I remember one night and we got up in the mornin and good God half o them were blowin down. These rucks, sticks in them, you see. But now they bale it, you see, no problem. But oh God we'd an awful work there. And we'd a big - we'd a hay shed you see, it'd take about - och it would hold - and then we made haystacks, you see, outside. We could winter more beasts than we could summer. We were makin a lot o hay. Big heavy crops. And then we'd the thrashin mill. When I went to Tynayare, my



grandfather, he was using a flail, be God, it was a thing - oh Jesus it was a dangerous thing. Club on the thing on a string. Well we had no thrashin mill. We'd very little when we went there. He used to thrash on the floor just. Knockin the corn off with this flail. They called it a flail. A stick goin up and there was a rope and then there was another piece hangin. You had to take care or it would knock you out. And that was before there was thrashin mills.

GW: So you just walloped it with this.

JF: Aye, walloped with the head o it. You put it down and there was boards on the floor and you kept the head and then you turned the sheaf again and belted away at that and rake and oh, it was a messy business. But we all - mostly people got their mills in, you see. But even although people had that they would get a big day for the thrashin mill and then you got it all bagged and away in railway bags in one day. You got it sold and all. You never had to take it near the farm at all.

GW: Oh I see. So who bought it?

JF: Oh travellers came round and looked at it and ..

GW: And it went away by railway did it?

JF: Oh aye, aye, away by rail yea. A big lorry would come up for it. I don't know what would have happened goin away back before - I think they were eatin - they werenae gettin great crops. I think they ate the most o the stuff themselves. Course never sold any grain. They just fed it back to the beasts. But we sold some. Used to make our own meal and that too you see. Beautiful. Oatmeal porridge. Oof!

GW: So how ... what was the process?

JF: Well there was a mill at Keltneyburn, bowl for bowl and the miller's paid. So you never paid him anything. But he came out of it alright.

GW: So you never actually paid for it in cash?

JF: No you got it off the corn.

GW: I see. He just took his share?

JF: Aye. It was great havin this meal. It tasted different - the porridge. Your own grown. Tattie oats. Marvellous.

GW: So that's oats - was there anything else?

JF: Well we didn't go in for barley in these days. Barley was a more modern thing. Wheat a little came into it. But it was mostly oats. And then there was the - in the lea we had different kind o oats, but for the meal and that it was the redland, you know, what you called the redland last year. You see you had different shifts every year. Seven acre shifts, that's what we worked on.

GW: Did you burn peat - was it peat or..

JF: Yes, quite a lot o peat was burned. But we - we didn't have it over there but a lot o the places they burned nothing else but peat. Plenty o peat round here.

GW: Is there plenty o peat banks round here is there?

JF: Och aye and then they used to have peat roads goin oot you know with the horses. They'd maybe take them on their back, the peats. But the folk didn't bother much. Not very famous for peat here. More famous up North. Sutherland and that.



GW: Aye. But it was burned..

JF: Och yes it was burned.

GW: Were you ever involved in cuttin the peat much?

JF: No, no, I never. No it's an art that too you see. It's a bank and you've special tools for it. Spades and that. I've seen them alright. But there wasnie much peat round about where we were. There's a little around here but away up North, Sutherland there, at the roadside you can see where - the distilleries burn a lot o peat, you see. But no, I don't think in this part o the country. It's too wet I think. But up in Glenlyon House there, the bothy at it, they have a fire there and it's always peat. They make peat in the summer you know. Very good burning too.

GW: That's local peat?

JF: Local peat. Great heat in it. We hadn't a way o gettin it. That's all that's about it.

GW: So was it mostly wood or did you have much coal?

JF: Wood aye, we'd a lot o wood. Never burned coal for eleven year. Nor a butcher either, neither of them. We shot everything. We lived very well. But I enjoyed the life in Tynayare. I went there till I came up here. I was there from 1914 till 1931.

GW: That's a fair time right enough.

JF: Aye. I've seen a hell o a changes in my lifetime. There was as much changes - I remember the first motor car up here too. Solid wheels on it.

GW: Who had that one?

JF: Fortingall hotel. No top on it or anything. Then we used to go to Aberfeldy with a bus. Horses taking a bus down. If it was rainin you were soaked. And there was a bus went from Fearnan you see and another one went from Fortingall to Aberfeldy. Well the man in Fortingall, he didn't want to go away too early, in case he missed folk. Folk would be waitin at the roadside between here and Aberfeldy you see, for the buses comin. There was two buses, there was Fearnan and Fortingall.

GW: This is horse drawn?

JF: Horse drawn, aye. Lovely horses. Open, aye they'd take about twenty folk. Well this man in Fortingall, this Jim Maclaren, he used to stand down at the tree you see and watch for this Fearnan bus comin. And he would let it come as far as maybe about half a mile away, or less than that. He would let it come near that, and then he set off in front of it, and he would get the folk at the roadside. But sometimes these people - they had clients, and they wouldn't go into it you see. They'd wait for the next one. Maybe cost ye a shillin or something, or one and thruppence. And that bus went to Aberfeldy and then took the folk back again. You were bloody soaked if it was wet weather. There was no shelter. It was really - I used to go with horses and that and I'd go down to Aberfeldy ..in October there. It was gey dark sometimes, and the horse would go along wi his nose on the road - no lights or anything on the cart. Takin sheep down, maybe we had a few lambs - maybe take eight lambs down, sell them and then a load o tups back or something. And then by the time I was comin back we'd have all

this business o the darkness comin. I enjoyed it, far happier times I think in these days than what we have now. Modernisation of everything, that's killed it. I've had a geat life you know. Eighty four years now I'm passed now. And when I think back.

GW: You never had the Gaelic at all?

JF: Oh yes.

GW: Did you speak much..?

JF: When I was down on these farms they never spoke any English to me, it was all Gaelic. I'm not a fluent Gaelic speaker but my Grandfather he had very fluent Gaelic and my mother could read and write it. They came from Arisaig, you know. Gaelic people. It's all Gaelic was spoken on the farms and that, well ... all yabbin away in the Gaelic. I can understand although I don't - well you get out o practice. They spoke a lot o Gaelic. Sung Gaelic songs too. I was in the choir. But it's a changed life now, maybe better for some folk, I don't know. Certainly it's not so - more comforts now in the house you see. We'd nothing but lanterns you see.

GW: No electricity.

JF: No electricity, no no. I've had electricity since 1931, but that's because the private plant that was puttin it in. Before the Hydro Board put it up Glenlyon. Major had his own private plant, you see. But otherwise, eh..

GW: That was just for his estate?

JF: He'd a turbine, one for himself and one for the estate employees. It was all water powered. Wonderful. And Glenlyon House had one too. Another laird there, and they're still using it and putting it back into the grid, sell to the Hyrdo what they don't use. It was a very massive affair altogether. Turbines. So was that one up at Chestill. Christ we had heaters and everything off it. We were only allowed one heater, but folk would put on more than they should in the cold weather and the jumper would come out. It was a great life that I'll tell you. Electricity since 1931 and that's no the day nor yesterday. Electric wireless in 1932.

GW: Is that right?

JF: Electric wireless.

GW: One o the first in the glen, was it?

JF: Aye, first in the glen. It wasnie very great sound, but it went. And then there was two phones. The major had his own private phone - the bloody thing was aye breakin down. There was only one wire you know, copper wire, and he ran this but - he didn't pay anything for that. But then he got the other one in and then I had two phones in the house. Well of I'm tellin ye..

GW: So when you had the wireless and other folk didn't did they ever come round and have a wee listen?

JF: Aye, aye. The first one I went to before that was 1926 I think, the schoolmaster had this wireless. And I went doon there I don't know how often, how many nights I went doon there and I never heard a damn thing yet! And it was squeekin and blurrinoot and he was fiddlin away at it you see. And not a thing. ... And then Harry Lauder was singin and this would be about 1926 I

think. And Bryden this keeper says come along and hear this wireless, but aw, you were hearin it but it was away in the distance. Very poor. Very poor wi me even up with the electric one - well, it was no bad the electric one, but eh ...

GW: What about the phones, would folk come and make use o that?

JF: Oh aye, well the phones, you see, the funny thing about the phones was Major Wisely was paying thirty seven pound a year for the phone and when Sir Robert Pickle came he took Chesthill, he got the lease o Chesthill House there, and it was goin tae cost him another thirty seven pound. Well what they did was - if you put in nine phones you got it for four pound - what is that, nine fours, you saved about thirty eight pound or something. And they asked ye to take the phone whether you wanted it or not, and there was farmers up in Balnantire, very old fashioned people, and they had this phone in and the had a dust sheet over it, it was covered. They were old bloody fashioned. And they didn't want the phone. I don't think they used it anyway. They were frightened of it or something.

## Appendix 2.E

### Interview with Dave West Crieff SA 1988.21

GW: Where was it you were born and brought up exactly?

DW: Airntully. The village of Airntully, or what was it - a hamlet?

GW: And that was on a farm?

DW: Aye, that was next door to the big farm.

GW: What size of farm would that be in terms of men?

DW: On the big farm? There would be three hundred and fifty arable acres and there would be four and a half pair of horses. That was like eight or nine horses and there was a man for each two horses.

GW: So that was mainly arable?

DW: Aye that was arable, mixed farmin.

GW: And your father was grieve there?

DW: Aye that's right.

GW: So when you were young was there certain duties that you had to do when you were still at school say in the morning before you went to school or at night?

GW: Feed the cows, clean out the byre and such things because there was nobody to do it until we came back at half past four or four o'clock from school at night. Father would feed them between twelve and one at lunch time, they would get a drink - bran drink or something like that.

GW: This is the cows belonging ...

DW: His own cows on the pendicle. We did nothing on the big farm.

GW: Never. Not even say helping out at the harvest or tatties or whatever?

DW: Potatoes lifting and planting.

GW: So was that just expected of you?

DW: No no it didnae matter, you'd gather in aboot fifteen or twenty people for tae get their harvest, their potato harvest up ye see. Ye'd three weeks holidays off school tae help the farmers wi the potato crop.

GW: So would you just help on the big farm or would you go round other farms too helpin?

DW: If you finished at the big farm, if someone was later you went and helped there.

GW: So was that paid on a piece work basis?

DW: No no. For an eight hour day you got three shillings.

GW: No matter what you did?

DW: No you had your piece - you had your bit measured out, everybody had the same. Eight yards to a bit and four yards to a half bit.

GW: So that happened at the planting and the ...

DW: No only at the lifting.

GW: Did you have anything to do at the planting?



DW: Ah well, you worked - twelve o you worked wi a bag roond aboot you and you put them down the drill. We daily worked an eight hour day, it would be about the same wages, three shillings a day.

GW: You did this when you were still at school?

DW: Aye at the Easter holidays, if you weren't finished planting you had to go back to school.

GW: So there'd be a few lassies in the family too, did they have different jobs to do?

DW: No no, all the same, planting.

GW: What about in the every day work during the year, would they be involved in the cattle feeding or milking or anything like that?

DW: No, I don't think so. No. No till they were left school and learnt tae milk and that.

GW: So when you did leave school what age did you leave?

DW: Fourteen.

GW: Did you stay working on the big farm or did you go away and get a fee?

DW: No, I was away at fourteen on another farm altogether, three or five mile frae where we stayed.

GW: And was that on a fee?

DW: That was on a six month engagement.

GW: And what would your duties be there?

DW: Well depends - an orrae min you had an auld horse and ye jist carted away turnips and things like that, any odd jobs that wis to do.

GW: What stage did you get a pair of yer own?

DW: Where did I have my first pair of horse? Och I wisnae very old when I had my first pair of horse. Maybe sixteen. The first year you were on it there were jobs you didn't get to do. Jobs you had to be particular at. You just got the odd harrowin and rollin and then after that maybe if there's four pair of horses on a farm you started at fourth and you worked your way up, depends how ye..

GW: Was there much rivalry between the different ploughmen on a farm?

DW: Oh yes, at that time.

GW: How did that show itself?

DW: Oh well there was always one (laughs) that could keep trouble going among the rest. Sometimes it was all right, but there was always one, that could just try and stir things.

GW: They'd always trying to be better than the next man, is that the idea?

DW: That's right.

GW: I suppose in a way that would be good cause it would maybe help them work harder.

DW: Well if you got somebody that was maybe just starting on the fourth pair of horses they'd try and do everything they could to hinder him you know. But if he was hardy ye just had to stick up to them. Och they weren't all the same, it was just odd ones.

GW: What sort of things would they do?

DW: Och anything, play tricks on you.

GW: Will was telling me about when - especially if one of them was leaving there was things they might do to their horses.

DW: Aye for the new man that was coming on.

GW: Do you remember any of the things they would do, he was talking about putting a hair from its tail ...

DW: Och aye, there is lots of things you could do. The collar that goes over their head you could put stuff on tae keep them from - smell, they wouldn't collar ye see. They would back away from it. Just things, that wouldnae happen very often though.

Break

GW: At that time between the farms was there much coming and going in terms of labour or machinery or horses or anything. Did they share much between the neighbours?

DW: No, unless it was something that was desperate. If there was anything happened at some farm then they might but no after they were settled in and that, they just worked away.

GW: The threshing mill though ...

DW: Aye, that was an understanding. Everybody understood that. You needit anything - for a thrashin mill coming in, you needit anything from fourteen to sixteen men to keep everything going like clockwork. So it was understood, they'd just let you know two days before the mill, 'we're getting the mill in on Wednesday I'll maybe need three men'.

GW: And that was just done on a swap basis, there was no money involved?

DW: No, no. There was no money involved at all.

GW: And how was it organised? As you say it was just two days before hand but would each farm have a certain date each year usually?

DW: No, no just when ever it suited. If they were requiring straw or something for feedin.

GW: So they wouldn't wait until there were a few farms in the area all needed it ...

DW: No, no if they were desperate for it. Generally when they did come there was always maybe two, three would take it, but just if they weren't needing it they wouldnae.

GW: So there was between fourteen and sixteen men ...

DW: Aye, depends on the way you was working it, you needed fourteen to sixteen men anyway.

GW: Could you describe a wee bit about how - what the jobs were?

DW: Well, if you had stacks in rows, right? If you had stacks in double rows you could cut out two men. Fourteen would do you. But then if they were way out maybe half a mile from where you thrashing you had to bring it in wi carts, horses and carts. So you needit extra hands then.

GW: So you would have a certain number of people up feedin ...

DW: Aye, up on the top there was one man feedin the mill, and two cutting the strings and passing the sheaves onto the ...

GW: And this was owned by a private company, the mill?

DW: Aye, it was maybe a private company.

GW: Were they horse drawn?

DW: No, no it was steam. The farmer supplied the coal and the water for the steam engine.

GW: So on an occasion like that who would supply the food? Would they take their own or would the farmer ...

DW: No, no the farmer supplied the food, he supplied all - there was always two on the mill, that travelled with the mill, and when they arrived - sometimes they slept on the farm of course - they always got their breakfast ... and then they started workin at eight and worked on until ten. There was a cup of tea came out. And then we stopped at twelve and you went in and had lunch. Startit at one again. And then a break at three and then on until five o'clock.

GW: And it was always finished by then, it didnae go on until evening?

DW: Aye well it was always finished because it was mostly winter time.

GW: So you were telling me about the lovedarg. Were you ever at one yourself?

DW: Well, I've been - no as far back as that. If you wis finished the harvest - I think that year a wis workin wi Betty's father, a think we wis finished at Blylock and we wis sent over tae the neighbour tae help them with the leadin in of the corn. Just for a day. But that didn't happen often and at that time in these years, that was jist, when did we stay at Blylock, forty something wis it? Aye in aboot the forties. So a mean it could still happen yet.

GW: So what type of situation would the lovedargs take place in? If a new couple came to a farm or ...

DW: Aye, or if anybody wis needin help. Anybody at all in the district wis needin help.

GW: Any type of help? Any jobs?

DW: Aye.

GW: It wasn't necessarily ploughin say?

DW: No, no. Anything at all.

GW: And is it right that if a new couple came and maybe they didn't have the chance to have their equipment ...

DW: That's right they'd get any help they required from somebody round about.

GW: What was the one you were telling me about - did the farmer die and his wife was left?

DW: Aye that could happen, aye they would come and help till they got organised again for tae get somebody in to carry on. Either that or she'd sell up if it wis a woman that was left.

GW: And all that help would be offered. They wouldnae have to come and ask usually?

DW: No, no.

GW: So you would just hope that they would do the same for you if you were in that situation?

DW: That's right.

GW: So there was never any money involved?

DW: No.

GW: What about the ploughing matches? They were organised by committees?

DW: That's right. A committee for every district.

GW: And - what was the biggest one you were ever at, can you remember? What sort o size would these things be? How many entrants?

DW: Oh, way back. The championships o Scotland. That would be pretty well back. I've seen - that was a horses - there was no tractors at that time. That would be ninety odd pairs o horses ploughin in one field.

GW: Would it be in a different place each year?

DW: Whoever wanted to give their field for to get ploughed. It would be somebody on the committee who would say, 'You can have fifty acre off me, or..

GW: Would that be an advantage to them - would it get some o their work done for them?

DW: Oh aye.

GW: So were they always quite keen to give them land?

DW: That's right aye.

GW: So what about the food for these things. Was that supplied or..

DW: Well it used to be in the olden days when it was horses and no tractors, there was always a bridie and a bottle o beer left for every man that was ploughin.

GW: Right. So that was supplied by the...

DW: The committee.

GW: The committee? Right. So the farmer wouldn't have to provide anything themselves for that.

DW: No, no no. You had tae pay entry money you see. When you entered for to plough, you paid - it wasnie - seven and six or something at that time.

GW: How long did that go on with horses? Can you remember when the last one you knew of would be? Did it go on after the war?

DW: Oh yes, oh yes. Oh it would go on tae the fifties. Actually, well for horses, then the tractors would start comin in.

GW: So around about the fifties the tractors would start?

Break.

GW: So at the harvest time. Once you had yer harvest in, was there much help given to somebody who hadn't got their's in?

DW: Yes, they would help out. Whatever was required, two or four men. To keep the thing whole, you know ...

GW: What, cause there always had to be ...

DW: Well, it wasnie keepin it goin, you know ... it wasn't workin like clockwork.

GW: Yes.



DW: You either had four, or - generally on a farm there was maybe three buildin and six carts cartin in. You'd three in the field, three on carts and three buildin, you see?

GW: So unless there was just say, one man missin, there was no point in sendin one man.

DW: Aye ye needit two tae make up.

GW: Aye. So it would obviously be more difficult to spare these, although once you'd finished your harvest I suppose..

DW: Aye aye it would be right enough, they were quite willin tae..

GW: And there would be no money involved there, that was just..

DW: No no. Well ye'd get a shillin maybe from the farmer for helpin out.

GW: And was there a celebration of any kind once the harvest was in?

DW: Well, eh, if you got two farms quite close to one another, and the farmers were friendly it would work out then, but sometimes if they werenae very friendly you know, there would just be nothing at all.

GW: And was a harvest home a regular thing - a celebration?

DW: It was a regular - it was on big estates.

GW: What would that involve - a dance?

DW: A dance, and either a dinner or tea and sandwiches.

GW: So would everybody club together to provide that sort o thing or..

DW: No no, the farmers would do it. The workers didn't provide anything at all. It was just a kind o a - you know a thanksgivin.

GW: And would each farm have their own smaller ones - say in a more dispersed community or..

DW: Well at that time - away back from thirties backwards - there wasnie many farmers had two farms - there wasnie the money in it at that time.

Break

GW: So when you first left home and went to another farm, did you go into a bothy?

DW: If you were single.

GW: If you were single?

DW: Aye you were engaged as a single man.

GW: And how many folk would be in there?

DW: Well it depends what was required - maybe three, four. And some places - when I was single away back in the thirties - the farmer was the only man that was married. And there was four o us that was in the bothy. Three horsemen and a cattleman. That was away back in the thirties. And other ones would maybe just have two in the bothy and maybe tow marrit men. It just dependit on the ...

GW: Right. So how was it organised say for the cookin for instance. Would each lad take their turn?

DW: Well in the bothy if there was four o ye, you took week about o getting the fire and - clean out the fire, clean out the bothy - you had a week. That was every fourth week. But you did yer own cookin. Cause everybody didn't eat the

same. Ye was on yer own, but ye must do yer - what they called 'on pannie'. You're on pan this week.

GW: Was that makin the brose or something like that?

DW: No. What we did - if there was a man who didn't have to go out in the mornin and feed the cattle or do horses in the mornin, the one - he would make the porridge. That was all.

GW: Right. And that would do - did you get provisions in or did you eat porridge a the time or..

DW: Well, you got yer - you got so much meal every month. That was in yer bargain. Meal and milk. That was provided by the farmer. So the boy that - you took week about - you took month about at supplyin the meal and ye'd sell the rest to the grocer, you see, to get some ... (laughs).

GW: Did you get much trips into town - into Perth. Did you get in very often?

DW: Well - is this for pleasure like?

GW: Anything. To get yer new boots or whatever..

DW: Aye well ye were in Perth every Saturday. Every ploughman was in Perth almost every Saturday.

GW: How - in the early days that you remember how did you get in? Was there trains?

DW: There was trains and buses. Saturday night was ploughmans' night in the town.

## **Appendix 2.F**

### **Interview with Jim Mollison Pitlochry SA 1988.22**

GW: So you were telling me in 1969 that you were shepherding - where was that?

JM: No, I owned the farm - across at Wester Leithen at the bottom of Glenshee. That was tradition - my tenant before me, he had neighboured, and we just had the same squad came again. Which was eight clippers, and the other ones either caught the ewes or rolled the wool. That was on the ewe clipping which was the biggest do. The hog clipping - there weren't so many came because then you were only dealing with two hundred sheep as against, about six fifty.

GW: What time of year was this?

JM: Our Hogg clipping always clashed with the Highland show so we didn't always get there. The Ewe clipping was a fortnight later. That's the second complete week of June, I think, the Hogg clipping. The shepherd and I or the shepherd and the cattleman - we had a tremendous amount of twins, park ewes, and we clipped a good lot of them before the ewe clipping and therefore you weren't so dependent on the weather, because if you have about six hundred odd ewes in the fank and it becomes wet - we used to push them into the buildings but you couldn't get all that gang in and hill sheep are not very keen on going inside anyway. It was a rodeo to get them inside. But gradually as people went off the hand clipping onto the machine clipping, they felt more independent and they broke away until in '83, well, 80-83 there was only two neighbours came, and they were the Jackson brothers who had small farms which they ran on their own, and then my squad used to go and help them. Cause no way can a man get on very fast catching the sheep, clipping the sheep and then rolling it. The thing is when you're down you're better to stay down.

GW: So there was never any money involved in such transactions?

JM: No. If you managed to get an odd man that wasn't connected with the farm then fair enough, but no, there was no money passed. And really the small farmer did best because one of them came but there was four of us went. But that's fair enough. It didn't happen with thrashing because we had a built-in mill. I took over nineteen stacks in the stackyard and I vowed there wasn't going to be any more stacks so we went combine. But the old ones - well not just the olds ones - the old Glenners were sorry to see the neighbouring going. At one time it was an awful whisky drinking carry on but not once the breathalyser came in!

GW: Would there be food provided?

JM: Oh, yes. It was an eating day. We got a mid morning break - a midyer - then they had full food in the house and then half way through the afternoon, another midyer. And then when we finished we used to always come to the farmhouse

for high tea. They enjoyed themselves. There was usually a whole ham. But it was really the machine clipping I think that made people more independent, cause they clipped a few at a time inside. But in spite of that, the old hand clippers could get finished just as quick. Cause there's some o the old hand clippers was just tremendous.

GW: It would be an art in itself, was it?

JM: Yes. They often had to call for the tar, cause there was a lot of nicks out of the skin.

GW: Did they ever have competitions in that sort o thing?

JM: They do have clipping competitions. They have them at ... Alyth show. One of the chaps that used to come to the clipping was Davie Stewart at Mains of Dalrullian, and he was a very good clipper - he's won prizes - and I think he went on course with probably the Wool Board and became a qualified instructor. Our shepherd was left handed and it's not easy to copy a left handed clipper if you're a right handed clipper. ... One of the Jacksons that used to come, he's forced to hire in a squad now, and in fact, the man who took over my farm, doesn't have as much staff, and they have contract clippers. The biggest worry there is whether it's a dry day or not. Of course, wool, at one time it was a big - a fair proportion of the income but now it's not at all. Not compared with the price of lambs. But it has to come off (laughs).

GW: This neighbouring, was there many other activities that it would happen in. Would they help each other in other ways apart from the clipping?

JM: Not unless you saw someone getting behind with the bailing. If you'd finished you went. And there was quite a bit of - occasionally borrowing machinery. We had a totally enclosed hill so we didn't need help with the gatherings, the shepherd and I could gather the hill in about an hour and a half. It was just the way the fencing was. But up Glenshee, they had gathering. They used to start about four o'clock in the morning, you know, before the heat of the day ...

GW: Is this because it was all unenclosed land?

JM: Yes. And a very big area. You see up at the Spittal of Glenshee, I think Finlay Cameron had about twelve hundred ewes. A thousand or twelve hundred. And his land went right up to the Devil's Elbow from the Spittal. There was two sides divided by the river. It was a big job. Ours wasn't a big job as it was a totally enclosed hill.

GW: So they would help each other in that respect then?

JM: Up the Glen they did, yes, as the area was bigger.

GW: How did that work, did they all just go and bring them all in?

JM: Well they gathered, say the Spittal, and I don't know what cooperation there was up there at all. There was probably, it would be all the Invercauld tenants really, I think. There were three of them with very big hill areas ... Now we weren't a big area. Well we had seventeen hundred acre with thirteen hundred hill, but it was split in two lots which made it easier to gather.

GW: And the implements you said, they might share sometimes.

JM: Occasionally yes ...



GW: Just of any description or ...

JM: No more, well as things progressed. You know we had precision sheeters for turnips or something like that. That was about all. And some of the smaller farms did contract in, you see, with the combine, and with bailing of course. But nowadays, you see there's some of these big estates cut down so much - the farm I had now is two men. Well they couldn't cope. They brought in contractors, and the same things happened on Nairn's estate, they have to have contractors in now because they've cut down so much on men, you see. Some of them got rid of all the cows and there's just sheep. They have to have help.

GW: So in your early days, were you brought up on a farm?

JM: Yes. My father farmed across there up until 1936. But he let the farm while I was still at school. So really I was away from farming - well I was at University, then I was in the Airforce, and when I came out the Airforce, I went in to quarrying. And then Rita's father said come and help us with the low ground farm so we went down there and when he retired I got his farm. But only had it two years when my tenant died.

GW: This was down in ..

JM: Northumberland. It was different farming - it was arable feeding farm - and I went away to the bank for a whacking great overdraft and moved farms.

JM: When you were down South was there much coming and going between neighbours?

JM: Just when the thrashing was on. But once the combines came in, that finished it really.

GW: The thrashing was a travelling mill?

JM: A travelling mill, yes. We had a travelling mill of our own but I was glad to see it go because the last time it was used, before it was burnt, and I'm glad that it was burnt - there was four of us trying to work a thrashing mill. And I was at the back of the bailer, putting the stuff into the bailer, and putting the bails into a stack. So it was hard going. I was glad when the thing got burnt ... Well there was four and the man that came with it. That was the total gang. Neighbouring had more or less stopped you see.

Mrs M: In the old days when we had the thrashing mill in everyone came from all the farms round about because you needed the help.

JM: You see in Northumberland an awful lot of the Duke's farms were round about the two hundred acre so they maybe had just the two men probably and themselves. It's the smallness of the farms that brought the neighbouring on in all cases. But there was sometimes a bigger farm involved. Because they could do with a squad from a bigger farm.

GW: So in your childhood you were brought on a farm until you were teenaged?

JM: Well I was brought up on a farm down - yes - until teenage, yes on a hill farm.

GW: Do you remember much about that. Were you involved much in the work as a child?

JM: Not really because Dad gave it up in 1936 when I was fifteen. I was still at school. But, oh the clipping days were huge then. It was all hand clipping.

Though there weren't as many ewes - the stock number wasn't as high then. Cause when my father had the farm across there - which was really three farms - he only had .. about four fifty ewes and fifty cows. I had six fifty ewes and a hundred cows on the same farm.

GW: Was there more neighbouring would you say then than when you..

JM: No when I went it was still the same - in '69, but it tapered off after that. Of course, you see the trouble was in the old neighbouring, away back in 1936, you were lucky if you has a motor bike. Most had bikes! I mean people are more mobile now.

GW: How far - back in these days in the thirties - how far could they travel to neighbour?

JM: The top one would be Ian Fleming. He had a motor bike! (laughs) Five or six mile roughly.

GW: How many farms would be involved within that?

JM: Oh there'd be - at that time there'd be about eight or ten, anyway. Ten farms.

GW: And how was it worked that you decided which farm you were going to that day? Did you have a specific day each year?

JM: Yes, you more or less kept - on the better farms the ewes were fit to clip before they were fit to clip on purely hill farms. The better the farm the sooner the rise was on the wool, so if you'd the best farm you were first. And as you went higher up, the rise wasn't on the ewes so soon because it was harder ground, so they come later. You can see that - you know, the rise on sheep is quite easy to see because they begin to peel on the neck. And this is why you have a hog clipping earlier because they're not pulled down in condition by having lambed. Therefore the rise comes quicker on the hoggs than on the ewes. Same with the tups. You can clip them early because they've done nothing since November (laughs).

Mrs M: You could say really that the social side of these gatherings has gone. Because if they came to work at your farm they more or less stayed well into the night.

JM: Oh yes, on some of the places they had a ceilidh. At some clippings I mean the whisky was desperate.

Mrs M: And they didn't get home until the next day.

JM: Oh no, some of them didn't get home.

GW: So everybody would stay just after the food ...

JM: Some o them wouldn't be fit to go home! Old Donald down here - he was connected with the Atholl Estate, and he talks about some o the Glen Tilt clippings, etc., and they had a great big copper pot and seemingly that was taken up to the fanks or the bughts whichever they call them and a whole sheep used to go in, cooked it. I suppose it would be a broth too, you see. But the whisky was - flowed freely.

GW: Would that be provided by whoever's farm ...

JM: Whoever's farm it was, yes.

GW: It wasn't the case that everybody would bring a bottle?

JM: Laughs - not the modern way. Twelve and six a bottle or something. Some of it would have been home made.

GW: Would there be instruments, maybe a fiddle or something, at these ceilidhs?

JM: I suppose there would have been.

Mrs M: Yes I think so. Who was it was telling me, he often got his fiddle, because he played, no doubt.

JM: There's often musicians, more on the low ground farms, because some of the low ground farms had the bothy with about four men in it. And there was often somebody played the melodeon and somebody played the fiddle. They didn't do that with a Jew's harp or a comb with paper on it! Well I know when dad had the arable farm near Dundee there was four or five men in the bothy. And then the bothy lads from other places used to come, you know, visit each other. That's why I was sent to boarding school cause I was in the bothy learning to spit and smoke! (laughs).

GW: And other celebrations. Would there be one at harvest time - the end of the harvest, maybe? A harvest home?

JM: I don't think so - the further up you got - there was nothing like the acreage of cereals which is now grown on the hill place. Sometimes they never got it in. I've seen snow on the stooks ...

GW: These celebrations that happened after the clipping - when did that die out?

JM: Probably like other things in the country when television started! (laughs)

GW: Do you remember - did that happen after you went back in 1969?

JM: Yea. I don't know what happened previously. Of course you see they'd a lot to do when it was a one man band on the farm. Unless the wife milked they had the cow to milk. It was good - it was a tradition and you just kept to it. In fact, when people dropped out, they weren't all that popular when they did drop out.

GW: Is this dropping out of the neighbouring circle?

JM: Yea. As they got machines clipping themselves and maybe a sheep shed up, they felt more independent and ...

GW: So they wouldn't attend, and they wouldn't expect people to come?

JM: That's right. And then of course as the oldies died or something like that and the young chap came in - and amalgamation of farms of course, cut down the number. Because there's some places where there was - what four farms, and now two. Three farms into one, etc., that cuts down the manpower, you see, and it's not there. And everybody had cut back on manpower since bailers, combines come in. And don't know how much neighbouring there was up here. Of course, when you get the size of the Atholl Estate, they would neighbour, whether it was in their own hands or let out I would think. But there's no neighbouring now up Glenshee that I know of.



## Appendix 2.G

### Interview with Dave MacDonald Birnam SC 1986.16

[Also present, Jessie Menzies and Mrs Jean MacDonald]

GW: Where was it you were born?

DM: Coupar Angus.

GW: Coupar Angus. And that was ...

DM: 1892. 21st of July.

GW: So that was on a farm, was it?

DM: I started to work on a farm.

GW: ... What age were you when you started to work?

DM: Thirteen.

GW: Thirteen. So you'd been at the school up till then?

DM: ... I left the school at thirteen.

GW: Did you start at five, did you?

DM: ... Oh it wid would be five, I would think. I dinnae mind much about that of course.

GW: You don't remember much before you went to school at all then?

DM: No.

GW: So where was the farm where you started work?

DM: The farm was at the back o Coupar Angus - the Borelands. A went there when I left the school. And I left there and went to a place at Campmuir - a Mr Crammond was in it. And I went there and the wages was ten pound in the year. And A stayed another year for twelve pound a year. And then I went back to the Borelands where I left for a pair o horse - gin that time a wis a right enough lad ye see. And so then I went to Millbank efter that. Millbank. And then Arthurstone after that ... That's near Meikle. That's where their mother was brought up.

JM: That's where you must o learned Gran tae smoke! (laughs)

DM: Ah well I did smoke at that time.

GW: So what sort o work did you do when you first started?

DM: Work on the farm, just. Orra work.

GW: So were you workin horses at all?

DM: Oh aye.

GW: Straight away as soon as you ...

DM: No, no for a start. When I went to Campmuir it was horses and went back to the Borelands it was horses again. It was horses a the time you wis wi the farmers.

GW: So that's doin the ploughin and that sort o thing?

DM: There was nae tractors or that sort o thing.

GW: So what sort of ploughs did they have? They'd be iron were they?



DM: Oh aye, there was twa or three different kinds o them. There wis what they called the swing ploo and what they called the Yankees.

GW: What was the difference between them?

DM: Well the swing ploo - wis a ploo they ploosed the lea with. And it made rits for the grain to fall into. ..

GW: The second one - the other one?

DM: The Yankee? It was just for ploughin in dung and that.

JM: It was a bigger fir - a bigger over turn.

GW: So would they be made locally by the blacksmith or ... ?

DM: Aye, they were all repaired by the blacksmith. And the irons - the sock and the couter and that would have to go to the blacksmith, maybe every second day.

GW: As much as that? As often as that?

DM: Aye.

JM: But Gary's wonderin where they would be made?

DM: Oh, the blacksmith made them.

JM: The whole plough?

DM: Well the frame - oh they could make the plough just the same. They could. Wullie Calder at [Langlees ?] made the ploos.

GW: So what sort o hours did you work on the farm? What time did you start in the morning?

DM: Well you got up tae yer horse at six o'clock maybe, half past five, and if there wis two or three o ye on the farm, there wis one always what you called on pan. He was the cook. He made the porridge, by the time you was sortin the horses. He made the porridge, that was yer breakfast, and then ye had cauld porridge at dinner time, that was a change, you see. Then you'd another change at night - you got a feed o brose.

GW: So what exactly was in brose?

DM: That was just oatmeal steered up wi a drap o water and a drap o milk.

JM: That's what yer grandfather lived on - brose. He used tae pit a bit o marge - faither used tae pit a bit butter or a bit marge and some salt and steer it up wi boiling water.

DM: Aye, marge aye. There wisn't sic a thing as butter in the bothy.

Mrs M: Did ye hae ony jam at all?

DM: No, it was near aye syrup.

GW: So you stayed in the bothy when you were on the farms? That was right from when you were thirteen - when you first started?

DM: Yes, efter a left the Borelands the first time. When I went to Campmuir that wis the bothy. I wis the loon.

GW: So how many would be in a bothy?

DM: Well I was on a place at Meigle and there was seven of us in the bothy. That wis Balmyle. My grandfather was on it. And there was seven pair o horse on that place.

GW: So did they all have - each pair o horse did they each have their own certain area, certain job or ..

DM: No, no they were all just mixed in thegither.

JM: The first pair generally led, didn't they? The foremen generally led - the ...

DM: Aye, there wis first, second, third ...

Mrs M: Wha wis the foreman when you wis on Balmyle?

DM: Well his grandson has a place at Balmyle yet. Dave, eh Dave Miller. He wis merried on Sandy Leith's sister.

GW: So the pair o horse - they would always be in the same pair?

DM: Oh yes. Oh aye.

JM: The bothies - you just slept and ate in the same place?

DM: Oh aye, aye.

JM: Aye they sat on their kists for their seat.

DM: Aye that wis a' the furniture - just the box.

JM: They a' had their ain kists.

Mrs M: I dinnae ken if I ever asked you - what like o bothy did you hae at Balmyle? JM: Oh it wis a good bothy.

Mrs M: A big bothy wis it? How many pair wis on it?

DM: Seven pair.

JM: It wouldnie be a' single folk. There'd be merried men tae?

DM: Dave Miller was foreman. He was married. A' the rest was single.

GW: So .. what about ploughin matches - did you take part in these?

DM: A wis at two ploughin matches. One wis at the Mains o [Arthurstane?] and the other wis at Viewbank. But a never was in the high class stuff. And a was at a lovederg once at Newtyle. A place they called Davison. The farmer hanged himsel. And this what you called a lovederg wis given tae the widow that wis left. And a' the farmers roond aboot bring a pair o horse or a couple o pair o horse. And yer grandfather and I wis at that.

GW: Was this tae get the ploughin done?

DM: The whole farm was ploughed in one day.

GW: And they made a ploughin match out o that, did they?

DM: Well it wasnie a contest. It wisnae a contest.

JM: No, no it was just tae help out. That was grandfather Watson, was it?

DM: Grandfather Watson, aye. A great man.

GW: So that would get her work done for her?

DM: That's right, aye.

Mrs M: Now are you goin tae memorise this..?

DM: It's on here [points to tape recorder] - you'll hae tae haud yer tongue, it's on here.

Mrs M: Oh I beg your pardon. That's me put ma fut in it again, Jessie! Sorry.

GW: Oh that's ok. So in the normal ploughin matches, they were contests?

DM: Oh they were contests. Oh yes.

GW: And how many would usually take part in that?

DM: Oh I've seen fifty and sixty ploos at the Howe o Strathmore match.

GW: Uh hu? And they judged the turnout as well of the horses and all the gear as well?

DM: Different judges for different things. Different judges for the feerin - the startin - and then there was judges for the ploughin and then there wis judges for

the finishin, judges for the horse and judges for the harness, the groomin, a the like o that.

Mrs M: [Recites poem in background - inaudible on tape - see below]

GW: So is there anything else you would while away the hours ...

JM: You would hae the melodeon in the bothy tae, would ye? Did you hae the box?

DM: The melodeon? Oh aye, had a melodeon.

GW: You played did you?

DM: Oh aye.

JM: At nights and that, that's when you put yer time in.

GW: So would there be a few boxes in the bothy?

DM: There wis a box in every bothy nearly. It was a funny bothy withoot one I'll tell ye.

JM: You see old photos sometimes and they're all sittin ootside on this form and someones got a box and anither een a fryin pan - where did I see that?

DM: [laughs]

GW: Can you mind any o the tunes you would play?

DM: Oh.

Mrs M: He used tae play 'The Bonny Lass o Bonacord'.

GW: Was it just all the popular tunes o the day?

DM: Aye, it was the tunes that - you never very often hear them played now anyway.

GW: No?

Mrs M: What was that aboot the ploooin matches ...

DM: Hey! You're gettin a tape tae yersel!

GW: That's alright! ... Pipe tunes would it be? Or dance tunes ...

DM: Dance tunes, oh aye.

GW: Would anybody be dancin?

DM: The Borelands wis a great place for that. Dancin at the top o the road yonder.

JM: Ootside on the road?

DM: Aye. The Cupar Angus ladies used to come ower the brae and dance at the top o the bothy road.

GW: That's the local lassies, is it? ..

DM: Aye, just the local girls.

GW: Mm hh. Did you play for them on your box?

DM: Aye. Oh aye. Try anyway!

Mrs M: Is it no awfy silly - a' that time playin the accordion and you let it go all of a sudden. Whaur did yer accordion gyang?

DM: Oh, I dinnae ken.

JM: Faither kept - he played his - he kept it up. That's how I learned tae dance. Wi his box.

GW: So what sort o dances would they be? Would they be group ones, or ...

Mrs M: Oh, Scots dances.

DM: Oh aye, nane o this fleein aboot!

Mrs M: ... set dances. Mair set dances.

GW: Set dances? Like the kind you would get at a wedding now, that kind of thing?

DM: You've heard o the quadrilles, haven't ye? The Lancers. Things like that.

GW: There's no much o that about now.

DM: No no.

JM: I think sometimes at the Scottish country dances. There maybe comin back.

GW: So that's the bothies. What about Sundays. Was it strict, religious wise? You know in some places they used to be very strict about what they could and couldn't do on a Sunday.

DM: Oh aye.

GW: Was there much of that?

DM: No, no. And then ye had yer day on the horses on a Sunday. You had yer day there too.

GW: Just feedin them, was it?

DM: Aye, and washin them and feedin them.

GW: Was there any other instruments in the bothies? Fiddles?

DM: Fiddlers.

GW: Ye'd maybe hae a sing song as well would you?

DM: The blind fiddler. There was an old boy - an old plooman he would be at one time. And he wasnie a very good guide on his own hesel. And he landit on the roads. And he was a fiddler. And he went blind. And he used tae come tae the Millbank bothy and play the fiddler. What they called the blind fiddler.

GW: Oh aye. What was his name, do you know?

DM: Oh I cannie mind his name. ... And there was one in Alyth, what did they call him again? Speak aboot forgettin?

GW: And what about the harvest time?

DM: Well you worked an extra three oors at the harvest time, you worked eleven oors at Balmyle at harvest time. And you got a tuppenny bap and a bottle o beer for yer ...

Mrs M: Mid-yokin as they call it. That was yer piece.

DM: A tuppenny bap. What they ca'd a butter biscuit, in thae days.

GW: So what about when it was all done, was there a celebration at night?

DM: There wis what they called a harvest home. They'd dance in the granary where they cut the grain.

GW: So that would be a dance ... ?

DM: The melodeon again.

JM: Just yer own entertainment.

Mrs M: There used to be some guid harvest homes.

DM: It was a decorated wi - what did they ca' them? Sheafs.

JM: Sheafs o corn, aye. Off the binder.

DM: Aye but there wis things we used tae make wi plaits.

JM: Oh yes, I forget what they ca' them. They used tae plait the ... aye. It's a knack that.

DM: Aye they were easy tae make.



GW: What exactly were they - were they just decorations?

JM: Wi the corn, you know, they would plait them and make fancy..

GW: They weren't made into wee animals or anything?

DM: No, no.

Mrs M: When you was ploooin was there any o that decoration at a ploooin match or anything?

DM: Oh the harness was a' decorated.

GW: What would that be decorated with - the same again?

JM: Wi wool or ribbons.

DM: I used tae dae that - plait the mains and tails. I did it at old Grandfather Watson's for donkey's years.

[Break] requested Mrs M to recite poem on tape

Mrs M: When Councillor Cunningham o Hillend

The [Yetts?] ploooin match I did attend

And I wish I'd clearly understood

That it was really something good.

[Yetts?] ploomen it was grand to see

Wi iron nerve, determined ee

[I'd be aince mair Queen o Stubbs ?]

Oh what a lot o hardy pups.

Ploo chiels comin as they liked

Through the gates and ower the dyke

Noo here's the prize list, you can tell

As weel as though ye'd been there yersel

[Yetts?] ploomen it was grand tae see

Wi iron nerve, determined ee

[I'd be aince mair Queen o Stubbs ?]

Oh what a lot o hardy pups.

That's a' the verses a ken and that's no the half o it.

GW: Very good! What where was that said?

DM: Wasn't there mair than that?

Mrs M: Oh a lot mair than that. You used tae say all that. What a memory! Did you say that at ploooin matches or did some o yer cronies in the bothy ...

GW: In the bothy was it?

DM: Aye.

Break.

GW: So when you were out in Canada, you were ploughin as well were you?

DM: On the farm, aye.

GW: And was it very different to what it was here?

DM: There was a seat on the ploughs there.

GW: Aye? O yea?

DM: And there was a seat on everythin you'd drive. The harrows - there was long pole, couple o poles and a seat on it. The harness could go underneath it you see when you were turnin.

GW: Where as here it would just be walking behind it. So what about horses?

DM: Horses there, aye.

GW: Same number - in pairs.

DM: No, four - four was yer team. Team o horses.

GW: Oh aye. Where as here it was always just two?

DM: Two.

GW: Did that get it done quicker? More pullin power?

DM: Oh a don't know how many acres you would plough in a day, but they didnae go in the ploughin the way they'd go here, you know - kind o half on the trot. See, they were only ploughin aboot that depth. Just a skim.

GW: That's just, what, a couple o inches?

DM: Couple o inches, maybe.

GW: That was mostly wheat out in Canada?

DM: All wheat aye. Unless there would be a few acres of oats for horse feed.

GW: Oh aye. So what was the social life like when you were out there?

DM: Nothin but work!

GW: Nothin but work! Did you have anything like the bothies over there?

DM: No no, you just lived in the house. Well, you lived in a hut ootside and got yer food in the house. ... And there was a sleepin - a wooden erection ootside.

GW: That was where the workers dossed down, was it?

DM: Aye.

GW: And how many young lads would there be?

DM: Oh there was just one. Just me.

GW: Just yerself?

DM: And the man that owned it of course.

GW: So there wouldn't be much..

DM: Oh there was nothin but work.

GW: There wouldn't be much - singin or you didn't have yer box over with you?

DM: No (laughs).

GW: So when you came back to Scotland. These feein fairs. Did you go to them at all?

DM: I went back tae the place a left tae go tae Canada.

GW: Oh aye. And when you first left school to go to yer job, did that take place through one o these feein fairs?

DM: No I wasnie at a feein market when I was engaged at the first place.

GW: But later on you were though?

DM: Oh aye, we used to go tae markets. It was the only holiday you got.

GW: Just once a year? You'd be fee'd for six months at first?

DM: Six months at a time, aye.

GW: And then the married ones ...

DM: Then usually re-engaged at the end o that six months, you see. If they wanted you. If they didnae want you ... you would get out.

GW: And then move on somewhere else?

DM: Aye (laughs).

## Appendix 2.H

### Interview With Jessie Menzies (Née West)

#### Baledmund Farm, Tulliemet

SC 1986.17

GW: So where was it you were born?

JM: Soothfield - Southfield cottages, Abernyte.

GW: Where about's that?

JM: That's between Dundee and Perth ... You go up Tullybaccart and roond that way, roond the back somewhere. I've never seen it ...

GW: That was 19 ...

JM: 1918, aye.

GW: So what's your earliest recollections, do you mind much before you went to school?

JM: No ... We shifted tae Airntully - how auld would I be? - six months - we shifted tae Airntully and that wis it. We went tae Murthly school, same as Dave? Did he say that?

GW: Aye, same as Dad as well.

JM: That's right. For a while anyway. Aye, well they got their chance at Aberfeldy.

GW: That's right. So you left school at what age?

JM: Fourteen.

GW: Did you have a job straight away or just..?

JM: No I was at home for a year. (Laughs) A' the washins for them - helpin out at home anyway. And then I says, och tae hang wi this, I'm off, tae get a job. They werenae very pleased about it right enough, but, what else? They wouldnie let ye away tae get a job, oh no ...

GW: No? You were needed on the farm?

JM: Aye, at hame, well it wis a pendicle you see. There wis so many o us, that was just the whole thing. So ye'd tae help.

GW: So what work did you go to do?

JM: As wis in Stanley. In Stanley Mills. Cotton - I wis a spinner. For ten years. I cycled up and doon.

GW: How far wis that?

JM: Oh, two and half miles? Aboot there.

GW: So, that would be - finish aboot five o'clock at night?

JM: No, six o'clock, I think, Gary, and then in the time o the War we were on shifts, and everything was blacked out. Just like at home, you know, all the shutters had to be put up. Aye, and the light on yer bike just had to have a wee peekie. It couldnie shine anywhere. And we used to 'hae sellotape - it was one o these lamps that just went on the hook at the front o the bike, you know, you'll



have seen one. And we just used to put that black sellotape stuff on it, just on enough to see.

GW: So you worked there all through the war then?

JM: Aye, aye. We were doin khaki, it was white cotton we were doin, you see, then we switched over to the khaki for the soldiers. We were quite busy then.

GW: So when you came home from work at night you'd have work to do on the farm?

JM: Well no in the dark but on light nights there was always something to do.

GW: What sort o things?

JM: Wash dishes! (laughs). Iron and .. just the usual jobs.

GW: Feed the hens?

JM: Aye, well they would o been done afore I got home. That was the younger laddies - they would dae that. Just in the hoose I was mostly.

GW: What about milkin?

JM: Aye, yes, I learned when I was quite young. A white cow and her name was Jess. And ... I was the only lassie that learned tae milk.

GW: Is that right?

JM: Aye.

GW: So how many ..

JM: Oh there wis just a couple faither had at that time, and their followers.

GW: Of course it would be mostly arable.

JM: Aye, yes yes. That was just his own wee bittie. He had a job foreby. He was grieve, you see. That wis his wee pendicle. But I did learn tae milk.

GW: What exactly did the grieve do? Was that just looking after the rest of the men?

JM: Aye, he was head. He was head man. And put them to their work and told them what to do. See his boss was a gentleman farmer. He didnae work. He wis a collar and tie man.

GW: Who was the boss?

JM: Cree, Airntully. That was when we were there, anyway. There's other bosses, but eh - like in Soothfield and that. He had a son that was an auctioneer. Norman, he was a great auctioneer. He got ... [?] He died o cancer. He would be older than Dave, I think.

GW: So how many workers was there on the farm?

JM: I think there was always three pair and an orrae. What they called an orrae, anyway. Aye. And then father a loan o these horses. That would be his perk. He wouldnie get overtime I don't suppose or anything like that. That was tae work his own wee bit.

GW: That was - five acres was it you were saying?

JM: Aye, well he got the implements and the horse from his boss to work his bittie.

GW: So all that was just his own profit?

JM: Yes, yes. That's why I suppose he'd be able tae ...

GW: To move.

JM: Aye, well when he'd sell the calves, the stirks anyway. That would be put in the bank.

GW: And then he'd have a general wage over and above. ...

JM: Oh yes, oh aye. He'd have to have a wage, Gary, oh aye. He would be out in the morning like the rest and then out at night - you used to see him lighting these lanterns you know, to go doon at night and see everything. He would be left responsible at eight o'clock at night. That was always to see if everything was ok. And to shut up the stables and that. Aye, he went away wi that lantern.

GW: So what about food? Would you make yer own butter, would ye?

JM: Aye, mother made her own butter off the cream, you see, the milk. You were sort o self supportin weren't you. Yer wee bit tatties and neeps. [ ? ].

GW: So what exactly did the butter making entail?

JM: Well the churn that she had - mother had - was a square one and it had a long handle on it and it was on the floor. What they called a plonker I think. Up and doon like that until it was made (laughs). It used to sit in the corner.. it was just a but 'n ben of course you see, and a wee place at the back. A wee scullery place at that time. And then it was all - the building and the steading and that was all joined on tae the house. It was all one row. Does yer dad no maind aboot that?

GW: Possibly will.

JM: ..It was all joined on - the old - you see some o these painted pictures tumble doon. You know..

GW: It would just be two rooms, the main bit?

JM: Yes, two rooms aye with the scullery at the back, that was all. Wi the water outside as you know, the pump. That had to be carried in and carried out, of course.

GW: That would be one of your jobs was it?

JM: (laughs) Aye, well we all helped anyway. And then later on when the house was sorted it was a rotary pump. .. You didnae have to go outside. It was fitted in the house. And it drew the water. What kind o pump? Was it a rotary?

GW: So, the butter, how often ..

JM: Once a week.

GW: And that would do for the whole week?

JM: Yea, yea.

GW: And what other food..?

JM: Porridge in the morning. And yer uncle Jim wouldnie eat it! (laughs) He hated the stuff. But he didnae get anything else if he didnae eat it. He used tae eat his piece goin - ye had yer piece back - ye had a piece for.. eleven o'clock and then ye had yer dinner piece. That was in the summer time. But in the winter there'd be a soup kitchen at the school. And ye paid whatever, a penny or tuppence, and ye got yer soup. And all the farmers round about gave the potatoes and the turnips for nothing, for the kids. Yes.

GW: So how many would be at the school? Would there be a lot?

JM: There was three class rooms - they werenae always used, but there was three class rooms. There was cookery too there. Aye, cookery. The girls always

got cookery. You didnae ask to take it, ye just - that was automatic, you took cookery.

GW: So what other things would be made? Black puddins at all, on the farm?

JM: No, no. Well, no. Meat rolls, maybe, or something like that, we used to make them, but ...

GW: Was it just mostly the things that were on the farm. There'd be very little brought in?

JM: Just bread, just bread - the perishables sort o thing. She never made bread but she baked every day. Girdle scones. Every day, she made scones. And oat cakes. She made oat cakes. So the only time you got - well this was later on when we were working - tea time on a Sunday, you always got a great tea. Sunday. A wee bit o cake or whatever. She baked too, of course. She could bake. But very little like that bought in. And of course I just follow suit, just the way you were brought up. I dinnae buy cakes either. Ken, it just takes tae ye.

GW: So how would things differ at say Christmas. What would happen then?

JM: There was nae Christmas! (laughs). No until we were - I dinnae mind havin a doll. Just a rag doll if I had one. Dot and Sis were different when they came on the go. There wis prams and - but I never mind anything like that. Course there was twelve and a bit years between me and Dot you see - the next lassie was there. I was amongst a - well there was Dave and Will, me, Jim and Allan and Erch and Bert you see afore there was -

GW: Auntie Dot.

JM: Aye. ... We'd maybe get an apple or an orange, that would be it, Gary.

GW: What about the meal, would they do anything special?

JM: No, there wouldnie be - well they'd do a chicken likely. One o our own chickens, that's what she would have. And then dumplins of course.

GW: Cloutie dumplins?

JM: Aye.

GW: So there wasn't really much of a - an occasion?

JM: No, no, no. No like what there is now?

GW: Of course they'd be working at Christmas on the farm.

JM: Yes, well the animals still had to be fed.

GW: What about in the mill. Did you get Christmas day off?

JM: No - no you just got yer holidays at New Year, a couple o days or that.

GW: Cause I mind at the mill in Pitlochry they were saying that they didn't get Christmas day off.

JM: No, that's right. No Christmas day off.

GW: What about Hogmanay, New Year?

JM: Aye, well as I say, it was Uncle Dave that - well there was nothing like what there is now. Until you got older, and was working and then you was maybe up at Grans, at Airntully, she had the shoppie there. And we used to go up there at New Year. In fact that's where we all gathered on a Sunday night.

GW: The whole family?



JM: Well all the young ones round about that wis workin. That wis the gatherin place, at my Granny's shoppie. Where all the cairry on an laughs would be I suppose. Ken, just young - just fun. Plain fun it was.

GW: So for yer dances and that sort o thing ...?

JM: Aye, well as I say, all I kent wis the village hall at Airtully. That did everything. But if you wanted to go far afield you would cycle. Like Murthly, there was a hall there, or Meiklour I've seen us cycle tae. I didnae really patronise Stanley very much. I worked there - and didnae patronise that very much. No me, but the laddies, Jim and Allan did but no me.

GW: So there'd be dances every week, or..

JM: Oh no. Just occasionally, just - more in the winter, there was none in the summer.

GW: So what would happen there, just ...?

JM: Just maybe a couple o fiddles or a fiddle and accordian. No bands as such - now. You know. Good dances just the same. Real jolly - sweat pouring off you (laughs).

Mad rush. All the women was at one side and men at the other. Or you booked sometimes, booked (laughs). If you seen someone that was good at the lancers or something and they kent you were good, you would book one another, and then you would just up to the top. Up to the top set. That was how that went.

GW: So you were saying about how you learned to dance. That was your father that taught you?

JM: Aye, wi a melodeon ... [?]

GW: That would be outside?

JM: No, it was in the house in the winter time. I've seen him playing ootside maybe in the summer tae maybe on a Sunday or that, you know, if they werenae doin very much but no, it was inside in that wee kitchen. There wasnie very much room (laughs). It was really him that put that intae me. He was a dancer hesel of course, he was fond o music. Aye, aye, he liked tae dance. He was quite light on his feet tae. So wis mother. As a was saying, it was a stone floor you see, and she used tae put a that white stuff on it. By the time she was finished there was nae (laughs) - nae stuff left which would cause stoor I suppose when you think aboot it now.

GW: So in the house, was there any salting yer own meat, or anything like that?

JM: Well as I say, some o these old houses had these cleits from the ceiling.

GW: Just hooks, like?

JM: Aye, just a hook like that. And they used to cure their bacon and hang their bacon and it was ...

GW: Was it over the fire, or ...?

JM: Well, while it was curing they just hung it there and then took it down as they were using it. It would be curing as it was hanging.

GW: It was just a matter of leaving it? There was no salt or anything?

JM: Well, I don't know how they did it.

GW: You didn't do that yoursleves?



JM: No we didnae do that, but I know that wis done. I know it wis done. And then as I say my Grannie used tae - they used to dae their own pigs and that. My grandfather used to do that.

GW: So at the harvest time there would be a lot more work than usual would there?

JM: Oh aye. All go I think fae dawn tae dark. Did Dave no say that?

GW: Aye. Would it be extra work for the women as well, would it?

JM: Yea, well, of course, the way faither was placed you see, we all went home tae their own. The Crees never put out anything that I know of, to eat. It was just, well maybe some o the wee-er ones in our family, they would take it oot tae father and that - a piece you see. He would likely know if he wasnie comin home, and then it would be carried oot. But you see, bein a gentleman farmer they wouldnie dae - no like what we would dae, you see, a workin farmer, we would do that. But you wouldnie get them tae.

GW: So would he be away a lot o the time?

JM: No really, no he was around watchin, keekin! (laughs) So mother used tae - and faither used tae say - keekin round trees and that, to see.

GW: Was he strict?

JM: Well father was wi him a long time, so he must o got on wi him alright. Ah don't know how many years - twenty five, was it? ... Then of course, did Dave tell ye aboot, you would piece neeps at night - did Dave tell you that?

GW: No really.

JM: Well, when they were growin a field o turnips and well you would take if there was - they'd be huge fields likely. You could go out at night and piece-piece work. You would be paid for that, so many yards. It must have been yards.

GW: What was it thinning them?

JM: Aye, thinnin them. You used to do that, and then, once was able - then they would hire a bus, and take us all tae the Ferry. But we'd be gettin on by this time. Twelve ir thirteen. ... This was your summer outing to Broughty Ferry. A the village and bairns would..

GW: That was the summer?

JM: Aye, the summer. I dinnae think Dave was there though, I never mind o him being there. Nor Will. Me and Jim. ... I mean that didnae always happen, it just happened as you got older. That was the reward, for helpin.

GW: Dad was saying he hated that job.

JM: Thinnin? Aye, of course he would hae plenty tae dae at Balnabeggan. You see I wasnie there. I wasnie at Balnabeggan. I was married a year before they went up there. That's why I dinnae ken so many o them over there as the younger ones. I was a year here, and then they came up the next year. I think they were hardy bringin up all that family, mither and faither. So yer dad would hae the harder - he would ken what like it was. Hard, hard - tatties likely tae begin wi they'd hae tae pick them a theirselves.

GW: Did they have a lot o sheep?

JM: No they didnae hae sheep. We wintered our sheep o'er there. Faither never had sheep. Well maybe latterly I think.

GW: Was it not a bit steep?

JM: Was it no woody hill? I never ever seen their hill. Ken that, I didnae ken what like it was.

GW: There is - a fair bit trees - we used to go up there to cut sticks

JM: Aye we were winterin sheep ower there. And there was one near it. And there was one year that there was quite a few lifted ... - they were traced at Mart.

GW: Was there a lot o that, sheep stealing about?

JM: Well, of course doon the way - well they had sheep but no like up here. Different countryside up here atehgither. I think it still goes on, Gary. Goes on now on Moulin Moors anyway. Bad ower there. Course there's no fences or that, you see. They say that anyway, that it goes on ower there. Och we've had sheep missin off the hill here right enough and never ever got. And dogs is another thing for worrying them. Folk come to the country and think it's great.

GW: So you were telling me about the church earlier ...

JM: No it was a church hall - Kinclaven was our church - but this was just the ... we had communion at Kinclaven twice a year. There would be a bus run and anybody that wanted to go would go to Kinclaven. That's where you took your communion.

GW: So the minister - he would come from Kinclaven ...?

JM: Yes, to preach.

GW: Just in the hall?

JM: In the church hall.

GW: Just one service at night?

JM: One every fortnight I think it was. There wasnie one every week. Every fortnight I think it was.

GW: What about Sunday school. Was that every week?

JM: That was every week. Ten o'clock in the morning. (laughs) It was aye a mad rush. Certainly we hadnie far to go. Hadnie far to go at all, cause it was a' just in the same village you see. The hall's doon. I was disappointed when I went by..

GW: That's just beside Airntully itself?

JM: Just in the middle o Airntully really. Will was born just across fae there. The house is down now and there's another one built in its place. That's where he was born. Father was - he must have been at Coupar Angus - Dave was born at Coupar Angus anyway. Then he came tae Airntully, and Will was born. Then he went away tae Southfield where I was born. Then he came back again. It was the pendicle he took this time.

GW: And it was just the farmer who took the Sunday school was it?

JM: Aye, the gentleman farmer. He took the Sunday school.

GW: So he'd be an elder was he?

JM: Yes, he was an elder o the Kinclaven church. Session clerk I think he was.

GW: So was there much that you weren't allowed to do on a Sunday at all?

JM: No we just did our own thing. No, you were free to do what you liked within reason. Folk didnae hae the money to gad aroond. There wasnie many cars anyway. He did have one - the farmer. But it was gigs of course afore that.

And horses. The neighbour where Dave was at Mill o Airtully, he had always a gig and a pony.

GW: Mostly it would just be bikes was it?

JM: Exactly. Aye.

GW: If you went anywhere afar, there'd be a train passing?

JM: Aye, there was Stanley station, and of course you could cycle to there and get on the train to Perth or Coupar Angus or wherever you wanted. There was a station at Murthly too of course.

## Appendix 2.I

### Interview with Dave West Crieff SC 1986.17

[Also present, Norman West.]

Talking of Airntully farm, and the pendicle upon which he was brought up. (First few seconds of conversation missed).

GW: How big was that - how many acres?

DW: The wee place that we had? - Oh, well Airntully farm - it would be three hunder acres, where they worked on. We had this holdin of five acres. That's what we were brought up on there. Two cows, and two calves and pigs.

GW: But it would be mostly arable though, was it?

DW: Aye it was all arable - it was work to feed the cows and pigs and ...

GW: So you were at school by the time you were there?

DW: Aye, I was at school.

GW: Do you mind much about school?

DW: Aye I can remember something about it! (Laughs) Walkin thon three mile every day to school.

GW: You walked three mile?

DW: Aye, we used to take short cuts through Drummondhaugh field. And when Drummondhaugh had sheep there they had a bin for holdin the feedin. And they used tae get what they called [locusts?]. Did you ever taste [locusts?]?

GW: No I didn't.

DW: In the mornin feedin - it was a sweet. I think sugar - they made sugar out o [locust?], didn't they? And we used tae pinch it oot o the thing and eat it.

GW: What exactly was it?

DW: It was a feedin for the sheep. It was square - I cannae tell you - it was broken up and mixed in wi the other feedin you see. And we had tae watch the farmer wasnie aboot. And then we walked to the school and walked home. Three mile anyway.

GW: So what time - it would o been an early start in the mornin, would it?

DW: Ah cannie remember - we must o left about half past eight or somethin.

GW: Aye. So that would o been just the usual subjects at school was it. The 'three Rs' and ...

DW: Aye. We had the qualifyin class at twelve. You sat your qualifying.

GW: That was at Murthly, the school?

DW: That was at Murthly, aye. Would Norman be at Murthly school?

GW: I think he might o been.



DW: Aye, he might o been. Ah was away workin by that time, you see. I was away - I went away from home at fourteen. Tae Innernytie - that was along near Kinclaven.

GW: So that was quite near then?

DW: Aye. Then Ah went to Blairhall at Stormontfield but that was the same farmer.

GW: So when you first left school, what was yer first jobs ... on the farm, was it just ...

DW: Oh aye, just anything at all. There was an old horse on that farm - the big farm - where ma father worked and ma grandfather. Old Dick they called him. And I used to get into drive him. I didnae like the orrae work (laughs).

GW: What exactly was the orrae work?

DW: Just doin anything you was told tae do. You'd no horses - you know, you wasnie fit for horses, except you got this ...

GW: So what age would you be before you actually got the horse?

DW: Well, probably Ah'd just be fourteen when Ah got it. Just comin fifteen when Ah got ma first horse.

GW: That was ...

DW: That was what they ca'd the orrae horse. That was one single horse, just did the odd jobs.

GW: Aye. And then you'd get yer first pair o horse ...

DW: Well, where did Ah drive ma first pair o horse? It would be at [Balbarrich?] That would be at fifteen, sixteen at the time. No doin - general work, just odd jobs too you know, knockin aboot wi carts and straw and that. And then Ah went to Islabank. Left there and went to Islabank.

GW: Islabank? Where's that?

DW: That's at Coupar Angus. And that was the horses - that's when Ah started drivin ma first pair o horses. And Ah was there a year. But they cut the staff - well they altered the staff. The farmin wasnie very good in these days. They startit sowing an awfie lot oot in grass. There was two or three o us paid off.

GW: So how many pair o horse would be there at that time?

DW: Were there was four pairs there at that time. And a tractor. At that time that was the first tractor ...

GW: What year would that be?

DW: Oh that would be - in the twenties anyway. When did I - maybe twenty-nine. Twenty nine.

(Yelp as dog is stood on at this point!)

GW: So when did you first go into the bothy?

DW: When Ah was fourteen year old.

GW: You went straight from when you first startit workin?

DW: Eh, no Ah worked a wee while at home. Just at Airntully - in the garden tidyin up. That would be - from the March until the November. And I was engaged to go to that Innernytie. I was fourteen.

GW: So how many was in the bothy?

DW: There was four - five o us in the bothy.

GW: The rest would all be older?  
 DW: Well they were older.  
 GW: Was there ever any married men in the bothy?  
 DW: Unless we didnae know they were married! (Laughs)  
 GW: So that would just be - one room, was it?  
 DW: Well, ye'd a livin room, and ye'd anither room where you'd sleep - three or four beds in it. Depends how many. ... It was a sort o a house, the bothy there anyway.  
 GW: But just a single level?  
 DW: Aye, that's right.  
 GW: So what about entertainment - what would you do?  
 DW: Och somebody could aye play the accordin or that. And along at the Kinclaven school they used tae go tae whists and that. But they wisnie much entertainment.  
 GW: What about singin - bothy ballads?  
 DW: No there - no there was naebody could sing there. Ah think if you startit singin you'd get kicked oot the bothy!  
 GW: But there'd be instruments o some kind.  
 DW: Och aye, there was ae boy had an accordin.. And there was boxin gloves.  
 GW: Was there?  
 DW: Aye, you'd put on the boxin gloves.  
 GW: And what about dances?  
 DW: Aye, the only dancin would be along at the school, no very far from us at Kinclaven school. No very often. I wasnie aged to go tae the dancin.  
 GW: You werenie.  
 DW: No.  
 GW: So, you won't remember much about them then. What would be the music for that, who would - just a boy on a box?  
 DW: Aye generally aye, a box.  
 GW: And that would be, what, country dances?  
 DW: Aye, just anything. Waltz, Quadrilles, Lancers, Duke o Perth - Broon's Reel anyway.  
 GW: So that would be in the school hall you said?  
 DW: Aye, in the school. Just move the forms and had a dance in there.  
 GW: How many folk would go to that?  
 DW: [ ? ]  
 GW: So what about food?  
 DW: You just fed yoursel. Except on a Sunday mornin. You had a - you got the breakfast for a Sunday mornin - a pound and a half o sausages. You took turn about.  
 GW: Just on a stove like?  
 DW: Eh no, on the fire.  
 GW: On the fire?  
 DW: That was the only thing you shared, on a Sunday mornin. You got - well, you buy it this week and I'll buy it next week.

GW: The rest o the time it would just be -

DW: Aye, feed yoursel.

GW: Porridge?

DW: Aye, just once a day, though Ah think at that time. [ ? ]

GW: So in the farm houses would there be any likes o cheese makin or butter makin or anythin like that?

DW: There was butter makin, Ah don't know whether they made cheese or no.

GW: Butter makin - do you know how they would go about that?

DW: Well, you saved up yer cream for maybe a week - aye, a week, and then you made butter oot o that.

GW: Just a wee churn?

DW: Aye, well big churns. They'd a lot o cream.

GW: Would most farm houses have one o them?

DW: Oh aye, well at that time every farmer had what they called house cows. Different from now, not many farms keep a cow [ ? ] but at that time ... we were allowed two pints o milk a day and the married men got four pints and you got yer oat meal - half a stone o oatmeal every month for yer porridge.

GW: And brose? Did you have brose as well?

DW: Ah no, I didnae eat that. I couldnae sup the brose (laughs).

GW: But they would - the rest o them would, would they?

DW: Aye some o them maybe would.

GW: So what about at the harvest time ... would there be celebrations at the end o it?

DW: I was never at any place where there was a celebration after the harvest. No, it must o went oot o date. Sometimes you would get a cup o tea and somhing tae eat in the afternoon but you had tae work a couple o hours at night for it if it was a good night. There was no overtime you see, they didnae pay you overtime until aboot nineteen thirty something before we got paid overtime. ... You'd tae work eight Saturday afternoons a year for nothing - four in Spring time and four in the harvest time. And you weren't paid but that was the bargain.

GW: So what about these ploughin matches, were they common?

DW: Oh aye, there was two or three. Strathord, Meiklour, Logiealmond - there was three or four in the district. Meiklour was a big ploughin match - ah've see ninety-odd ploughs at it. They came from all over.

GW: Was it a serious business - did everybody take it really seriously, or was it a day out ... ?

DW: Well, if you was lucky enough to get your plough - you see the plough that you used at the ploughin matches, you didn't use every day. No in my time. They were only special and sometimes you wouldnie get it to do what it was supposed tae dae. It depends on the ground. If it didnae make a job, well, you was no in the prize list.

GW: So, gettin the harness ready and everything - would that be a day's work?

DW: Well if you wanted tae dae that you did that in your own time. If you wanted to go with a nice clean polished up [?]

GW: All decorated would it be?



DW: Aye.

GW: What with - would that be -

DW: Eh, wool. It was just - you got the iron and made things you wanted and covered it wi blue and white wire and a wee [ ? ]

GW: And then there'd be different judges for a the different aspects?

DW: Well, when I used tae attend them it was - there was two judges for the ploughin, two judges for the horse and harness, and that was all. You know the feerin - that was the start. The ones that was appointed for the ploughin, did all the ploughin - in connection with the plough, and then the other ones, they did all in connection wi the horses. So there was they four, and two in each.

GW: And, so what about these - where they helped out - what was it - a lovedarg?

DW: Oh a lovedarg? That's no in connection wi ploughin matches at all. This is if, maybe a farmer comes intae a farm - and maybe you're here - farmer comes intae a farm and he's fallen behind wi his work, and if he's neighbourly at all, maybe he'd send you - go and take yer horses and go and plough for Mr So-and-so for a day. And they always had a certain day for it, and maybe ye had ten or twelve pairs o horses ploughin. That's what they call a lovedarg.

GW: And that's just - no payment involved, just ..

DW: No, no. And then if we needit a hand they returned. You see at that time when the travellin mill was on the go ... they, everybody if it was here, you needit fourteen men. You must have fourteen men and two women for cuttin the strings. Maybe it would go to the neighbour on a day and we would send two men. Some other place the same. This is how they worked - they helped one anither.

GW: Could you just tell me again about the travellin mill - that was just for ..

DW: That was for thrashin. That was the only thing - it was for thrashin. And it pulled the mill - a steam engine pulled the mill. And it came in, and he pulled in between two - he built the stacks for tae let the mill in between , and it sat in between.

GW: Was it the steam engine that actually drove it -

DW: Aye, wi a big belt. They'd a big fly wheel and a belt and it drove the mill. ...

GW: So these travellin ones - they would just come tae the area and just -

DW: Aye, travelled fae here tae there, wherever they were required. They were on the road every day thrashin.

GW: You'd just get it for a day or a couple o days?

DW: Aye, whatever you needit.

GW: So how would that be paid for?

DW: The farmer paid for it. The farmer had to pay the mill - the owner o the mill. He was either with it drivin the engine or he had men doin it for him. Some had two or three mills on the road you see, these travellin mills.

GW: So that would be a job in itself for somebody, just to take it round.

DW: That's right.

GW: So - the pair o horse. How many - of course it would depend on the size o the place, but there'd be the first pair, second pair, third pair, is that right?



DW: Aye.

GW: So what would be the set up? Just the most experienced ...

DW: Well if you was fit for tae drive the first pair then you got a pound or two pound more than the others, but you had tae lead the men. If there wasnie somebody there, you were in charge. And it went back, the less experienced as it went down the line.

GW: So would there be any set way of startin in the mornin?

DW: Oh you had to be there at startin time. Fed them at half past five, start at seven. And everybody had tae be there at five minutes tae seven. And got the jobs that you were gonnae be doin. Except your uncle Will, when I used to go in and tell him what to do in the morning I'd be coming oot the door and passin him and the brushes used tae hit the window [laughs].

GW: So would the first pair have more difficult jobs to do, or would they all just do the same work basically?

DW: No, you'd your own work to do, you hid tae keep up yer turns wi yer man that was leadin. You must go the same times as he went. But it was a sort o competition to see who could do the best. We didnae know any better in these days of course.

GW: Could you tell me about your early days when you were learning tae dance?

DW: Well, he would - you know yon chairs ye hid - kitchen chairs ...

GW: This is your father?

DW: Aye. You got thon in the middle of the floor and ye held the back o them and you started. That was the way you learnt tae dae *pas de bas*.

GW: Would he be playing his melodeon, would he?

DW: Aye, learnin ye tae dance. I dinnae ken aboot Norman and them whither they did it or no. And Jessie made a pair o wooden swords and she used tae dae the sword dance. At nights, that was how we spent the winter nights.

GW: That's just in the farm house like?

DW: Aye in the cottar house. But n ben.

GW: So would their be any other self entertainment?

NW: Singin and dancin.

DW: Aye, and washin dishes [laughs].

GW: What sort of songs?

NW: Ballads.

GW: Bothy ballads?

NW: Aye, bothy ballads.

DW: Aye well, aye they used tae sing them.

GW: "Nicky Tams" and that sort of thing?

NW: Depends on the time of year too.

GW: How?

NW: Well at New Year it was rowdy wasn't it?

DW: Oh aye at New Year, Hogmanay night, you couldnae get tae sleep.

GW: Would that be all the family or the -

NW: Family, neighbours, friends.

DW: Anybody at a. They used tae travel fae house tae house.

Break

GW: So what other ways would they pass the time?

DW: Well in the summer nights they used tae gather in. You know they would come in aboot a the young eens. You used tae play roonders, throwin the hammer, puttin the stone, wrestlin. Anythin at a that you could -

GW: Just in the fields?

DW: And football, there was quite a lot of football. There was a lot o folk aboot Airtnully at that time. Big families you know and more men aboot the farms of course. Tug o war.

NW: One always had to outdo the other, better than the other sort of thing. Isn't that a fact Dave?

DW: Aye that's right. It was the same through the day.

NW: Even at work, who could do the most and toss the sheafs the highest and all the rest of it.

GW: Would that be carried on when there was actually ploughing matches?

NW: No that was a serious day.

GW: Aye but was there still the same rivalry?

DW: No no, yer ploughin matches was carried out in January and February when it wasn't frosty. But this was the summer nights. This was fun in the summer time. Mischief - yer Uncle Bert used tae bile eggs in the hen hoose and then set fire to it [laughs]. Didn't he?

GW: And what about medicine and that sort of thing. Would there be local home made remedies?

DW: I don't think so. No, no when I remember.

NW: If it was good enough for the cattle and horses it was good enough for us [laughs].

DW: Well yer doctor always visited you at that time. You never went tae the surgery at a. ... it wasnae very often there was a doctor. I think ye had to pay for the doctor at that time anyway yer self. There was nae Health Service at that time. That would be in the Thirties. Yer Uncle Dave at Birnum wouldnae tell ye that one Sunday morning they pulled one o faither's teeth oot wae a pair o pliers. Pulled the teeth oot o yer Grandad one Sunday morning. Had him lying on the bottom o a bunch o straw and they pulled the teeth oot. There was some yellin o course goin on yonder.

GW: Just an ordinary pair o pliers?

DW: Aye, they pulled the teeth oot. Maybe would o got sixty days if they'd been foond oot of course [laughs].

GW: So what aboot for the animals, would there be vets?

DW: Oh ye'd vets. Ye'd vets. I just phone for the vet. There wasnae so many illnesses in animals at that time. Actually ye didnae carry so much stock at that time because you worked a rotation o ground and yer ground was much cleaner and you left it longer in grass.

NW: In those days there was little or no artificial manures. It was all what's commonly called dung. I'll tell you something I vividly remember. In the winter goin down with you to the chaff hoose at the mill down in the steading and filling up the mattresses for the beds.

DW: Oh aye aye.

NW: And we were just kids - oh great fun, ye'd tae climb away up on top of this mattress, it was stuffed wi chaff.

DW: It was filled wi chaff, and when it was just filled it was away up ...

NW: Away up, it was great, when you were a kid up on top o this high mattress. Eventually, you know, ... it flattened down. But that was our mattress.

DW: Aye, you always knew when you'd nice, chaff, clean chaff ...

## Appendix 2.J

### Interview with Jack Myles

Perth

SA 1998.20

GW: You were telling me earlier about your early farming days - could you just go over that again. It was the Alyth area you were ... ?

JM: Well, no, one of the brothers farmed near Alyth, but where I was brought up was up in Cortachy, up in Glen Prosen. I was born in Alyth and then we went up there quite early in my childhood and we'd be up in Cortachy until I would be about seven year old.

GW: And that was on a farm, was it?

JM: That was on the farm of Blackburn. And Dave who's through there today, there was one day I was telling him about the old thrashing mill, the old mill gyang up in Cortachy and I said to him, "I'll tell you, if it's a good day Sunday we'll go up and I'll gie you a look at this mill gyang". And of course when we got up - I hadnae been up there for a year or two - and when we got up, we discovered that the farm buildins had been - you know the yuppies had got in there, and the farm buildins were made into a house, and this mill gyang, it was a room. So we didnae bother goin intae the farm (laughs). Anyway, I went there - I suppose I'd be maybe two year old when we went there.

GW: What sort of farming was involved there- was it sheep?

JM: That's right. Sheep and cattle. There wis a wee bit o hill. It was a rented farm on the Airlie estates, you know the ... Earl of Airlie. And, well, they're still there yet. But most of these farms, I suppose, will still be tenanted, I don't know. But that was what I suppose we would call a marginal farm now. They wouldnie sell any corn or wheat or barley. They wouldnie be able to grow wheat or barley, I wouldnie have thought. It wid be all corn, which they would - they'd thrash it. There'd be this old fashioned machine where the horse went round about on the mill gyang. They would thrash the corn and then they had this set o fanners that they used tae use. The mill obviously didnae make a very good job o the thrashin, and there was a lot o caff still in the corn. And they used tae put it through these fanners, you know, that they had to grind the handle and that separated it. But the most o the corn, apart from what was fed to the hens, would be - it would go through the corn grister, you know the bruiser, which had the bruisers on it. That would be fed to the horse and it would be fed to the pigs of course. And there was aye a pig being killed and the hams hung up in the ... I tell you one of the things that hits me these days, aboot the sell by date, you know when you used to smoke the ham. The pig killer would come in and before you went to yer bed that night a' the ham would be a' cut up and it would be salted [?] and some o it I suppose wid be hangin up the lum. You know there



was an iron bar went across the chimney and that used to hang up in the ceilin at one time for months and months.

GW: And it never went bad?

JM: (Laughs). Well it must o done some time!

GW: Was it always smoked or mostly salted or..?

JM: Mostly salted, aye. But there wis some o them smoked it. I can remember when I used to go to my Granny's doon at Blackhills ... at Airlie, and they had the hams hangin up there, and they also had - it's something I've never seen, it's the only place I've seen it - was dried fish hangin on the wall. You know it was dried - it would be salted I suppose. But I never really went into that, they just used to cut a bit open.

GW: Would that have been fresh water fish, caught locally?

JM: No it would have been skate or something like that. It was a great big ... And they used to just cut it open. I suppose they would o had to boil it to get the salt oot o it, but the smoked bacon, that was quite usual.

GW: So there was a pig killer came in?

JM: Aye that's right aye, and killed the pig.

GW: Would that be his normal job?

JM: No, the chap we used to get, I think he was foreman on one o the local farms. He would come in and you had a the gear ready. You had the big wash-hoose boiler on you know to scald - take the hair off the pig. And they used tae get a ladder, and they would hae the pig tied up on this by the hind legs and then they would just gut it and - that was after they had it in this big tub.

GW: Did they scrape it?

JM: That's right aye, scrape a the hair.

[interruption]

JM: And they used tae always - you know lookin back, I just wonder how they were able to get a that work concentrated into a day. You know, having the pig killed early in the mornin, and then go through a this butchery process. And they would clean oot the puddins as we call them and they would hae the meal and that ready - you know the oatmeal and that- and they would fill these - I can mind they used tae twist them roond - fill it and twist it roon, on tae the next one, you know. And some o them used tae collect the blood when the pig was killed. This was for the bloody puddins. But a lot o these things that we were givin to eat when I was a bairn, I mean I canna look at them now. You know, and the - this idea, we'd aye be interested in seein the pig bein killed. You know, I could no more watch a pig bein killed now than fly in the air. Funny that, you get squeemish aboot things. And shootin the rabbits. We used to go out shootin the rabbits. There's nae way that I could go out shootin the rabbits now. I must have become sort o civilised, you know (laughs).

GW: So, would the pig killer stay and help with all this process, or would he just ..?

JM: No, he just generally killed the pig. But I suppose, without the pig meat and the milk of course, there wouldnie be a great lot o stuff bought in at all. I can mind, when you'd hae some o yer relatives comin tae visit ye, which would

generally be on a Sunday - ye worked on a Saturday, you see. You worked on a Saturday up until twelve o'clock. So the only time you would get a visit from anybody would be a Sunday. They aye had mince. Mince was awfie easy diluted and thickened up and so forth, you see. I think this would be the main idea. And of course you could spread it oot a bit. And of course, there was aye plenty tatties. I suppose it would be a form of - I never heard the word then - a form o subsistence really. It would be a form o subsistence farmin. There wouldnie be a great lot o money changed hands, I wouldnie think. Just growin enough corn and potatoes and a that sort o thing. And the oat straw, as I can recall, used to be fed to the cattle aswell. They dinnae use oat straw now you see. And that would be fed - I suppose the horses, they would get hay I suppose.

GW: So the cattle. Would it be mainly dairy cattle or would it be beef cattle?

JM: No, it would be beef cattle. A couple o cows, a couple or three cows just for the milk.

GW: So the cattle would be - would it be fair to say the cattle were the main income?

JM: Oh yes, and the sheep of course. And then the other brother, he had the other farm, Cuilinie[?], which was - well it was the neighbourin farm. And they used tae help each other. There didnae seem to be, on that farm at Blackburn, there really wasn't any cottar house. So my father had obviously to get help in when he was possibly havin a big thrash. I can't recall him ever havin the big mill in. You know, they used to have the big thrashin mill, the big steam engine that towed this thrashin machine. The way they used to do there was never done on that farm because it was really too far away. And they used to build the stacks in rows and the thrashin machine used to come up between and then there was a stack on each side and they would move to the next lot.

JM: So on your father's farm and his brother's farm when you talk about havin a big thrash, would that be more just the mill that was already on the farm - the horse driven one?

JM: I can't recall the big mill ever comin up there. I dinnae think it would o come up the glen. There wouldnie be enough work for it. But then my father left there - that would be I think roon aboot the time his father died. And there was some sort of strange set up within the family because that would be towards the end of the First World War and obviously my father was able to get hesel disinherited because he then had to take a fee. When he left Blackburn he had to take a fee and we came down to Ruthven and he would be about maybe about a year and a half on that farm and during his second year there the local shop and post office came up for lease. The big problem always was when you wanted to get out of workin on a farm, first of all you needed two things. You needit a house and you needit a job and that was the ... you was caught in this trap. But this was the big opportunity of course. But by getting the lease of the shop and the post office, it meant that there was a good salary attached to the post office and of course there was the house. And I can remember it cost - the rent was forty pounds a year which really was very very cheap but it seemed a lot o money then. Ploughmen at that time would be earning in a whole year maybe

twenty five or thirty pounds or something like that which wouldnie really be much. But they got the lease o the shop and the post office and they were there for nearly forty years. And when they left of course it was after the Second World War and of course the farms were all mechanised and so on and the population was dwindle. The school is now closed there and there's thirty members of the Church of Scotland congregation and there are three primary pupils. It's just an instance of how these places are gettin depopulated. And yet the parish next to it, Airlie, they've got a two-teacher school. There seems to be a lot of pupils there, but just in that particular area, that parish o Ruthven, the thing just seems to have dwindled away and the community's going to die. But at the time when we were young and I went there I would be somewhere about eight year old, and there were over a hundred pupils in the school there. I started school up at Cortachy. I would be somewhere about two years there. And we walked from this farm - Blackburn and my sister and I ..used to walk to the school down to Cortachy. And I was there about two years ago I went back to the school, I went back at lunch time. And the kids were playing around and I asked if the head teacher was available and this little girl took me in and knocked at the teacher's door. And there was the head teacher and there was a student teacher. And they were busy at their lunch, and I think I spent about a couple o hours wi them. The kids were playing about an hour and a half after they were supposed to be in the school! It was kind o funny. I got them to get out the old register and to look back and they were able to pick out the date when my sister started the school and a year later when I started the school. And it was really quite interesting that, you know.

GW: So what year would that be?

JM: That would be 1919, when I went to the school. August 1919.

GW: So in your early days on these farms, were they both mainly family concerns - there wasn't a bothy or anything?

JM: No, there no bothy there. I think on that neighbourin farm there would be a bothy, there would be a bothy or a cottar house ...

GW: So in that family situation was there quite a lot of trust on the children to carry out their work? Were they expected to perhaps work harder than say a family that had a bothy and so on where there was extra hands available ...

JM: Well you had your jobs, yes. The main job that I can remember was at the weekend on a Sunday, what you had to do was carry water in the buckets and fill up the boiler. You know there was the boiler at the wash-house. There was no runnin water. So ye had to fill up the boiler. And there was a stand that opened out - it was hinged - and there was a big bath on there that would o hold maybe about twenty or thirty gallon o water. And that was the rinsin water in there, you had to fill that up. And then you had to break the kinlin, and set the fire. My father used to get up about five o'clock in the mornin and set that goin ... It was mostly wood they burned anyway. There was a big range in the kitchen and there was a boiler on the right hand side with a brass tap, and on the left hand side there was an oven. It was amazin the sort o things you could cook in that oven. It was pretty much a hit or a miss, but they had what they called dampers which



they used to cut off the air or let some more air in and it was the same at the boiler at the other side. The thing seemed to work ok but there was no bathroom or anything like that. If you wanted a bath of course, you got out the big bath. Boiled up the water in the boiler. It was pretty primitive but I suppose we were just as happy as modern day kids who seem to have everything laid on.

GW: What about the women folk who were involved in farmin. Was there much cases where women were expected to work outside in the fields as opposed to the indoor domestic role?

JM: Oh yes, well my mother, she would obviously have had to help my father when he was doing his sort o small thrashin and that, she would have to help him in that. And also the - one o the things I can remember vividly was my father ploughin. They used tae - in the old days they had these what they called swing ploughs and whoever was workin on the farm, whether it was the ploughman or the farmer, they were very meticulous in getting the furrows very straight. They only took about a five or a six inch furrow, and it was really beautiful when you saw it lined up. And they used to then sow the corn by hand, and the women, one o their jobs was that after the bags o corn were set out at various points in the field, they used to have to, they had a bucket, and they would fill it wi corn, and empty it into this sheet, this sowing sheet - straps went over the shoulders, and the straps went round the back. And I can recall my father sowin this corn. And then once they sow the corn, they then got the harrows yokit, and they then harrowed it across at right angles to the furrows, and this filled the - you know it was all level by the time they were finished. And then when the crops startit tae grow of course it was in straight lines. And there was a great emphasis put on everything being straight. The feerins had to be straight. What they did was they measured off the field with the feerin polls and then they got - the first feerin was generally in the middle. And they would go along and they would put in the feerin poles; they would put the first one in maybe twenty or thirty yards from the end rig. And they would set them up dead in line with each other, and as my father used tae come to each pole, he would sometimes take out that pole and he would always stop when the pole was between the horses' heads. take that pole out and then go on to the next one, take that one out and by the time he was finished and it was absolutely straight - it was quite incredible. I never saw why it should have to be straight, you know, it would grow the corn just as well if it had been slightly bent, but there was some sort o.. pride in your work, you see. And when they were drilling - making the drills for potatoes and the neeps, and that also had to be dead straight. And I can remember on the bigger farms that somebody who was really - a young chap - maybe seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, maybe wasnie good enough, so as he'd be allowed to drill at the side o the main road. He was allowed to practice in a field where nobody would see him. And this was this pride in the work. I suppose it was a great thing; it was a craft, wasn't it, really?

GW: And the reverse of that, would it be that people might criticise other people whose feerins weren't straight?



JM: Oh yes, there's no question aboot that. And the phrase they used to use, if there was a really good ploughman, they used to speak aboot him being a 'guid hand', he was a 'guid hand' at daein things. And a great thing too, if you were a good stacker, if you could build a good stack and build it nice and plum and properly hearted. They used to put a great emphasis on the heart. They used tae have this boss, when they started the stack. If they didnae build the stack properly, then it would let in water, you see. It wouldnae be dry. And sometimes the stacks would start heatin up, and would be known to go on fire, wi this spontaneous combustion. The heat would build up if there was no ventilation. And a lot o the farmyards they had ventilators. I just can't remember, they looked like triangular shape, and they would push them in so that they'd be - air would get in underneath and this would be really to save the stacks heating. And after they had got all the stacks built they would have to theak them, you know, thatch them. And that was always wheat straw. If they didnae grow wheat they would buy in the bunches o wheat straw, and they made a great job. The stacks were absolutely dry and they finished them at the top, by puttin them - they used to make these corn dolly things. You know some o them were great at plaitin these and they'd put them on the top o the stack. And this also, had a practical purpose as it would run the rain off, you see. They would make them wi fairly long pieces of straw and this design would be at the top and it would be set on. And then they would rope them, they used to rope them. I can always remember, it was diamond shape, you know when these sparty [?] ropes were ..and what you did was to anchor them. You used to get hold o the - you know the arse o a sheaf, and twist round, keep pullin it out and twist it round, and then you would twist the sparty an then shove it in the back. And it was really quite strong that.

GW: Do you think skills like theekin the stacks and so on - would they be passed down father to son?

JM: Oh yes.

GW: Did you ever learn?

JM: No, I didnae.

GW: So it would maybe be a bit older - when you were in your teens..?

JM: By the time I started the work of course there were plenty young lads workin on farms and so forth, but with the advent o tractors and so forth there wis a lot o the skills went out. It wasnie necessary for instance to tak narrow furs, you see. There were a lot o farmers you see used tae get a lot mair work din - they had what you called Yankee ploughs, that would take maybe aboot a ten or a twelve inch fur.

GW: Was this still while they were usin horses?

JM: That's right, yea. The farmers that wanted to operate in the old way, they would use this swing plough. That was - they would only use the swing plough of course when they were ploughin the lea, you know, the fallow grass, after it had been lying fallow for two or three years. That would be the swing plough. It had a little wheel and it had a couter. The wheel first determined the depth and they had this couter which cut in, and the plough then turned in ...

GW: You were talkin earlier about - when your father's farm and uncle's farm were side by side and they would help each other out. Was there other people would come and help for any reason at any particular time o the year, maybe at busy times: would other neighbours come and go between farms helpin at all?

JM: The only time they would do that - I can never remember anything like that up at Cortachy - I can't remember the big mill ever being in there. The did a the thrashing with this mill gyang. But about the only time on farms at that time where they would help each other would be when the mill was in. These farms there, you see, the amount of arable ground that would be available then would be quite small. They'd be quite a lot o hill. If you're ever up there in Glen Prosen, you'll see just at the - where it goes down tae Glackburn, there's a fountain there that commemorates captain Scott of the Antarctic, what they're daen wi that up in Prosen I don't know, but anyway it's there.

Break

JM: You'll see that there's a lot more arable - you know there's a lot o the hill, you know the marginal land on the hill has obviously been taken into cultivation. You see you had to buy all yer own fertilisers and so forth. Everything that come on the farm had to be paid for and so they paid for as little as possible. It really must have been a bit grim.

GW: Would you say there was a reluctance to use banks and loans and that sort of thing at that time?

JM: Oh they wouldnie hae loans.

GW: They wouldnie have loans? If you had the money you bought it and if you didn't ...

JM: Saying it was a tenanted farm, they would ... And of course goin further back - this wouldnie happen when we were in farmin, but there was a lot of this sort o barter if you like, you paid in kind. The Laird maybe, he didnae get his rent you see in money. That wouldnie be in my father's time or my grandfather's, but possibly further back than that the Laird would finish up wi an awfy amount o tatties and neeps and hens and so forth that he had nae use for. You see they had nae money but that's no in my time, that goes back quite a bit. The payment in kind.

GW: In the sheep farming for things like clipping and so on, would there be any coming and going between ...?

JM: Och yes there would be at that time, or ye'd never get the job done, that's another thing..

GW: Do you know how that would work, like for instance, how many people would be involved in this circle?

JM: Well, wi the Myleses, I suppose you see, they would probably come up - I can remember that my father's cousin, used to come up. He used to come up and stay wi us. I would have thought that they maybe had enough within the family, you see because they had these two farms, tenanted farms at Alyth. There was obviously a lot of coming and going between them. But there's only one o the

Myleses in farming now, and they're up at Edzell. That was my father's cousin, Bob, his son, he succeeded to the farm up at Edzell after they left Alyth and so his son is still in there yet. This chap David Myles, he was a Tory MP. I used to sometimes phone him up and tell him he was in the wrong party! (laughs).

GW: Did he listen to you though?

JM: No much, no!

## Appendix 2K

### Interview With John Menzies Lettar Of Balleid Blairgowrie

SA 1998.23

GW: So you were telling me that you think there's been quite a few changes even since you started. You started in, what, maybe the fifties?

JM: Fifty-five.

GW: Fifty-five. Right. Were you brought up on a farm before that?

JM: Mmm hh. I'm the third generation in this farm.

GW: So your parents, your father, was here?

JM: He was here and my grandfather before that. But they originally came from the Aberfeldy area. They had a farm on Fothnach Estate first - well they actually had two let at the same time. Then when he died they gave up the one on Fothnach Estate and stayed here. But there's been Menzies' here, I think that was 1910, or something, they came.

GW: And he was a tenant, was he?

JM: Yes, at that time.

GW: And then you bought the farm...

JM: In sixty-four. It was a small estate - three farms on it. And the chap who owned the estate was a colonel in the army, or something. He wasn't married and he died in the early sixties and it was a niece who was left it and she didn't have any interest and she sold it.

GW: Was there much difference in terms of ....when you bought it as opposed to being tenants. Was it a lot harder to begin with, would you say?

JM: No, no at that time. It's a lot harder now.

GW: You were saying, that when you first..took over here, there was probably more labour required than nowadays.

JM: Yes, machines have taken over fae the labour side. With the harvest, as I was saying, it's totally different now. Potatoes as well. The three of us here now, we lift all the potatoes ourself, with a machine, whereas we had a squad of maybe twenty-five, maybe thirty people to do the same us three of us are doin with a machine.

GW: These squads, would they be just a mixture of everybody - locals - or were they one of these squads which went around the country...?

JM: No it was all locals that would work here. At that time with potatoes, you grew a bit yourself and you let a bit to a merchant. When the merchant came in to lift his, you got him to lift your bit at the same time. It was all local, Blairgowrie..

GW: So would the merchant actually pay for the labour to come in ?

JM: Yes. That was done right up until maybe early seventies. And after that we stopped growing for four or five years and then we started again on our own



without a merchant where we just employed - well we have raspberries as well, and a lot o the labour that came to the raspberries, we got them in to dae the tatties. Before we bought them as seed, and then we would just do it all ourselves.

GW: So some of these squads, would it be like kids in the squads?

JM: Yes, mostly kids. Well we only had maybe four or five days and that was it - that lifted your crop.

GW: And basically the same with berries. You have berries here now?

JM: Yes, we've grown berries here for, near thirty years now. But it's the same, it's all mostly kids. Some parents, mothers anyway, ye get mothers and kids comin. But it's all local labour as well, from the surrounding area.

GW: Was there not ... a lot of folk came up from Glasgow and places for the berries. Does that still happen?

JM: Not so much now. See the like o Essendy there, that was all raspberries from the 1930s right on. And now there's very few raspberries grown. But at that time there was a tin city as they spoke about. That was all the dormitories for the Glasgow people. They would come up for maybe six or eight weeks in the summer and they would stay there all the time. Each grower had so many dormitories on this sight, you know it was a big.. it was all corrugated iron huts and kitchens and everything there. Each grower had maybe two, or depending on how much crop ye had, how many dormitories you had on the sight. And everything was worked fae there: they went out fae there in the mornin and you went back to there at night. But that was really in the hey day of the thing. There'd maybe be a thousand pickers in the dormitories at one time. It was really big. But then that's all gone now as well. The sanitary thing's came in. Fair enough long ago folk didnae bother but now they've started strict controls on sanitary and things like that and the thing faded out and they bused them out fae Dundee, Fife, Perth, you know all roun about. It's cheaper doin it that way now than tryin to provide the accommodation that's required. So most of them are bused in now. But then machines are taking over there as well - there's about fourteen or fifteen machines now this past harvest been working in the area, and they have eliminated a lot o the labour.

GW: So how do they work with berries?

JM: A shaking finger sort o thing, that revolve round. These shaking fingers shake the bush and the fruit drops off onto this belt at the bottom and gets picked up.

GW: Right. I didn't realise that. I was just about to say it would still be fairly labour intensive.

JM: Well this is fairly new and there's a lot to be desired o them yet. But they will come. You know they said that about tattie harvesters and a' that when we started off. They will come right enough. Whether it's a good thing or no I don't know. I think it could change, whereas just now there's a lot of small farmers grow maybe five, six acre of raspberries, and get a good return off that: it could change now - the farmers doon Strathmore, they'll maybe put in thirty acres of raspberries, harvest it with a machine, and that's how the fruit will be grown in

the future. This wee boy up here will be knocked out altogether. I think that's the way it will go.

GW: So, the combines, when they first came in it would have made a big difference for labour?

JM: Oh aye, aye. Well here there was four men here at that time and you got an extra man in at harvest. Ye'd all the stuff to cut wi a binder, stook it all, drive it in, stack it, then you thrashed it durin the winter months.

GW: What sort of thrashin machines would there be then?

JM: Well that was wi the travellin mills that came in. But that was a different - see at that time it was a different sort o a life, you know. I think we've lost a lot o that. You know, there was far mair pride in your work. You know at night you would walk the district to see somebody else's stacks. You know, when it came to thrashin, the thrashin mill came in and you see well we would have - I think it was five other farms, and we all worked together. When you had the mill everybody came to you, and there was never any money changed hands, nothing like that. I don't even, well there's a big farm down there, lower down than us, now they were a big farm; they employed far more staff than we had here. But they still sent their staff up just the same, and when they were thrashin we sent our staff down. It didnae matter if they were sendin four men up and we were only sendin two back - that was never ..there was never anything like that taken into account. If he had four days at the thrashin mill and we only had three, you know, it balanced itself out. But money never entered it at all. These were good days in that..well, I was younger, right enough, as well, but you went to the mills and there was great rivalry and plenty fun at the thrashin mill days, you know. Hard work, a lot o it right enough, when you think about it now, but you never thought that at the time. We never knew anything else, that was the way it was done.

GW: So they'd be steam thrashin mills, were they?

JM: No, I don't remember the steam. It was all tractor driven ones by that time.

GW: This is the fifties?

JM: Yes. You see I was only - fae the time I started workin up until 1962, the thrashin mills were finished by then. I only had a short period at them. Then the combines came in by then.

GW: So these thrashin mills, would they be like - someone would own one, and that would be what they would do, travel around the whole time..?

JM: There was a chap from Burrelton that we got. Harry Smith - he had a mill. And it seemed to be - maybe in the area there was two, in about an area from here, Blairgowrie, right round Burrelton and that - two tractors in that area wi mills. You got in either the one or the other. You see you maybe only had four, five days at it. And that was your crop thrashed. I often wonder now how they managed in those days to be able to keep their grain on the farm from October say, to February, March afore they thrashed it. We couldnie afford to do that now. We've got to get it down the road as quick as we can to get the money back in. That's one of the biggest changes. At that time they didnae seem to - well folk werenae committed to banks the same as they are now. But we had a

lot o fun in those days, which is not there now. You never see that now. ...Wi this big place down here, it was an old man that was the grieve there, and things were still done there in the fifties and early sixties, as they were thirty years ago. If you were on the grain there, they had to take the grain to a loft, about a hundred yards to the stairs o the loft. And ye'd twenty seven stairs you'd to carry this hunderweight and a half bag up the stairs, and tip it out. And then go back doon and yer next bag was full at the bottom and there was maybe three or four o ye on the grain doin that. Of course when you were away the boy put a fifty sixer at the bottom o yer bag. That was the sort o things which went on in those days. They were good days in those days.

GW: So the likes of when the threshin mills were comin round, and if a neighbouring farmer was sending staff to you ... would they just take a piece with them...?

JM: No. Each farm - .... the farmer's wife provided the meals. You got a piece in the mornin, your dinner, and then a piece in the afternoon. And then there was a lot of rivalry as well, you know. How good a meal you got here - you knew where all the best meals were, by the time you were goin roond. And then that was - of course in those days it was a more friendly sort o neighbourhood anyway. There was more people in the neighbourhood at that time as well. Now you never - very seldom you see yer neighbours the same as ye did in those times.

GW: With these tractor driven threshin mills - I know from speakin to other people who remember the steam ones, it was quite labour intensive. You'd maybe need fourteen or fifteen people to do the operation. Was it still the same with the tractor driven ones?

JM: The actual thrashin mill was still the same whether it was steam or whether it was the tractor. A lot of skill was involved .. at that time, that nobody could do now. Because they've all gone by the wayside. Buildin stacks and buildin strae soos and - that's gone now.

GW: So did you start to learn that from quite a young age, being brought up on a farm?

JM: I suppose you did. Ye never got to build stacks until you were - well ye'd been workin - it was aye the grieve or the gaffer who built the stacks, and you just forked .

GW: But you'd be watchin all the time, and learnin?

JM: Oh aye. You see it was an art in itsel even forkin, you know when you were goin to the mills and that. Or the sheafs - you know, there were two women on the top who cut the band on the sheafs, and fed them into the boy who was feedin the mill. But you had to turn yer sheafs in, it had to be heads into the women a' the time. You couldnie just fork in any old way. If you put a sheaf up the wrong way, you werenae long in gettin it back doon roond yer head. Ken, ye didnae put another een up like that. You know there was a lot o skill in it as well. Skills that the young folk now will never ever see again. Maybe that's a good thing, I don't know. You know, that was just the way things were at that time.



GW: So you'd always be getting labour in from other farms, who therefore knew what they were doin, basically? It wasn't just a case of gettin anybody in?

JM: Well, the like of buildin the straw, and the big soos they built. It was an old chap who worked at that farm as well. He built the soos on every farm. You know, he was the boy who built the soos, so everytime there was a thrashin mill came in, whether it was here or there, he built the soos there. That was just the way it was.

GW: And this idea of neighbourin farmers sendin labour for the threshin mills - did that happen for any other job, about the fifties? Was there much comin and goin between farms?

JM: No, that was about a' there was. You see, there wasnie the same need, at that time, because every farm had enough staff really. Now, I think - well we work quite a lot with two other neighbours. Silage wrappin and things like that, because we dinnae have enough staff to do it. Well, we could do it but it would be that slow. And we're all doin it at the same time. So we just combine. You know, there's more o that back in now. But there never was for the last twenty or thirty years. But it's beginning to come back now because ye're short o staff and some o these jobs the more staff you have the quicker you do the job.

GW: Right. So still it's not - no money's changin hands for things like that..?

JM: No. But there's very few jobs like that. It's only the last, maybe two, three years that's started. Just because we're wrapping silage now. It was never done before.... Instead o makin silage in a pit, you just bail yer silage, like ye were bailin hay. And you wrap it wi polythene. Now you see them runnin roond the countryside - a' the bails wrapped in black polythene.

GW: So it's the actual wrapping part that you need to combine with your neighbours for?

JM: The quicker you wrap the stuff after you bail it the better silage you get out of it. So you usually have somebody bailin. And the wrappin, you've got to have somebody on a wrapper, and somebody to stack them, and maybe two or three bogies to drive them in to the wrapper. So it's all got to be done fairly quick to keep the silage that you're goin to be wrappin fresh, and the quicker you get it done, the better. So that is really why everybody seems to combine together and try to get the thing done. But that is an area that has came back. But there's no many other...I think that there's a lack o that now. If people helped in the past, you never seem to see that now - nobody would go and help their neighbour or anything like that now, unless there wis money involved in it.

GW: What about if you saw someone really struggling, for some reason, maybe they'd been ill or something...

JM: Aye, see you see that .. I can remember way back in the fifties as well, you know maybe if somebody - their crop was a bit later or something, they were strugglin tae get - you would go and help them, but they wouldnie do that now. I ..wouldnie like to go and offer, cause the chap might be thinkin, what's he comin and offerin to me for? Does he think I cannae do it? You see there's a lot more of that come in. That was never there long ago. If the boy was needin help, you went and gave him help, it didnae matter what it was. But now, you see, it's



difficult. You wouldnie go and offer: if he asked, fair enough. That has gone in the thing as well. But I think that's only the way the whole thing's gone - financially, and - money's the biggest involvement in the whole thing.

GW: So everything's geared towards, keeping the banks happy?

JM: That's about it. Yea. And that has done away with a lot of the comradeship and what not in the area I think. Everybody's that committed now.

GW: Is there still much social goings-on with neighbouring farmers, in....societies or whatever?

JM: It's still there, I don't know why, it has changed. When I was at the school, in this community - I think the biggest thing is people are not there now, in the area, that they were years ago. When I was - well even when I left the school - they still had two schools in this area. Well now there's none. There's one in Blairgowrie, but at that time there was a school at Marley and a school at Clunie, and there was a lot of young folk in the area. And at Clunie especially there was a hall committee there. And there was a lot of different things: sports, Halloween, there wis everything. Parties, you know, plenty things for the kids, and for the adults as well: tattie balls, there was a lot of things. But they've all gone as well, they're no there either. They've tried to revive this tattie ball thing. But then the folk are no in the area, so they never get... you know the people that's left here now - that used to be here- the Fothnach Estate there, every farm on that estate was let. There must be seven or eight farms on it. Well two men work that whole estate now; where there was seven or eight families there thirty years ago. That has been a big - it's affected the countryside as well. The big estates taking over the farms into their own hands. Where at one time there must have been seven families there, well there's two now. A lot o that is common right round the area.

GW: The tattie ball you were mentioning. Is that like a dance celebration after the tatties are lifted?

JM: Yes, that idea. You used tae hae harvest homes. You see, away back .. I can just remember it, we used tae have harvest homes on some o the farms. We used tae hae them up there in the granary. Efter the harvest was finished a' the neebors came doon and that, but that's - I can just remember that, it would have just been after the war. But they're all gone as well now. You never hear o anything like that.

GW: Can you remember anything about them at all - would it be just dancing and music...?

JM: Maybe a fiddle and an accordian. There was aye a few bottles o whisky and.. . Then you see the other way o lookin at it as well, that was the only entertainment they had at that time. Well we have plenty o entertainment. That has had a big effect on it as well. People never went out for a meal or anything like that in the same vein as they do now. That has changed.

GW: And bothies for instance - were there many bothies around here in your memory?

JM: Well I can remember the bothies. We had men in the bothies right up until 1962. They were pretty basic. Again, at that time you never knew anything else.

Looking back on it now it must have been..... But all the folk we had in bothies, they all got their meals provided, like. Their meals was made in the house and taken round to the bothies.

GW: Taken round to the bothies? They didn't come round to eat in the house?

JM: No. They got their meals in the bothy. They made their own breakfast, I think, that would be all. They had their mornin break and their lunch, and they got their tea at night.

GW: So they would be unmarried would they?

JM: Yes.

GW: Just young lads usually?

JM: No, it depends. Usually two older, and maybe a young lad. And then at that time you could always pick up a young lad round about. There was aye somebody's young lad leavin the school or something like that and ye got - ye'd maybe two older chaps in their thirties, forties in the bothy and you maybe had a young lad - local, who just came in during the day, sort o thing.

GW: So someone who lived in the bothy for instance: if they got married would they be hoping to find a permanent position and get a house somewhere?

JM: Well, anybody here doing that they had to, cause there was no other accommodation. But I think that was the....the ones I can remember in the bothy, there was none o them married, I don't know why..

GW: And would they tend to stay on one farm for quite a while. I know going further back to the early years - say before the first world war - an awful lot of mobility....

JM: Aye, change every..

GW: ..Six months or every year at the feein markets and so on. Was that still around?.

JM: The ones that we had here, anyway, they were here a long time. And then round about - you know, like o the thrashin mills, you were seein all the staff anyway. The people who came, as far as I can remember, they worked at the places they worked at. There was very little changin really in this area at that time.

GW: So feein markets would have been finished by then?

JM: Oh yea, I cannae remember the feein markets.... By that time you advertised for staff. You put an advert in the Courier, or something.

GW: Or just by word of mouth, knowing someone?

JM: Mmm. I cannae remember the feein markets at all. I've heard plenty of folk talk of them, but I never had any - it was before my time.

GW: So in the bothies, they would get a yearly, or a weekly wage, and the bothy would be ..the accommodation in the bothy would be part of that. They wouldn't pay a rent or anything for it?

JM: No.

GW: And their food, you said.

JM: Yes.

GW: Was there wild times in the bothies that you heard of?

JM: Och, no really. No here anyway. I cannae remember.

GW: Would they maybe have a bit of music, or something to keep themselves amused?

JM: Och no really, you see by that time wirelasses were on the go. They had a wireless, I remember that. By then that was the big thing to hae a wireless. So that had taken away a lot o the entertainment you heard o used to be in the bothies years ago - the fiddles and melodeons, and things.

GW: One of the other things I'm interested in is .. children, when they're growing up and the further back you go, the more important they were.. as part of the workforce. But when you were growing up on the farm, did you have your own chores and things you were expected to do when you were still at school..?

JM: Yea, you did.

GW: What sort o thing?

JM: You aye brought the coo in at night for milkin anyway.

GW: You didn't actually do the milkin, you just brought it in?

JM: Well, I did later on, maybe by the time I was thirteen, fourteen, something like that. A lot of the time, if my father wasn't there you'd maybe do it, but you never had to do it when he was there. You always went and brought the milkin cow in..

GW: Was that from the time you were quite wee?

JM: Aye, yea. Maybe bring the milk coo in right enough. The like o harvest time, you got tae drive the tractor between the stooks, things like that from the time you were - as big as you could haud the clutch doon, sort o thing. Saved the boy haein to jump on and off every time having to shift it. But just generally what had to be done.

GW: Was it expected of you?

JM: Yes, yes.

GW: And you wouldn't get, like, pocket money or anything for it?

JM: No. You see, I find that difficult now. My young lad or Sandy's family - if they dae anythin it's right expensive and they want paid for it. That to me is wrong, cause we never thought about it like that. But it's just changin times, I suppose. You never ever thought you were doin it for.. you were just doin it cause it had to be done. And that was your job, sort o thing. But times have changed that way now.

GW: And - I don't know - did you have sisters at all?

JM: No.

GW: I'm just wondering if it was different for girls at all. From other families you might have remembered from about the place.

JM: I don't know.

GW: Certainly going back further, boys and girls seem to have ben treated the same when it comes to doing the work on the farm. And what about women, the wives, did they do much outdoor work, at all by that stage. Likes of at the thrashin mills for instance?

JM: Well the thrashin mills there was usually two women did the thing. They came every day, sort o thing. A thrashin mill - the farmer's wife was that busy

with the food, you know she'd to do all the food and that. So they were tied up wi that anyway. But my mother never really worked a lot. My wife has worked a lot more than what my mother ever did, I think.

GW: Again, is that maybe because there's less staff now?

JM: It could. And we're doing a lot of different things now we didn't do at that time. Like the potato dressin and that. We do all that ourselves now. This was from maybe seventies up until eighty five, eighty eight. Then both our wives are working now, away from the farm. Up until that time they used to do a' the raspberries, a the casual work on the raspberries and the tyin up and the tattie dressin. They did a lot o work on the farm at that time. But then it just - as the years went on, things got harder. And it was far better for them to go out and get a job to bring in. It just couldnie be done. If it hadnie been for the wives going to work, I doubt very much if we'd still be farming now. We would still of been here, I suppose, we'd have struggled on anyway, but we've a far better lifestyle because of the wives workin, and that's just what it amounts to.

GW: Whereas in your mother's generation, would that not have been thought of?

JM: No. And I dinnae think the need was there either because maybe they didnae have what we have today, but they had a ...they seemed to...

GW: I suppose the aspirations would be different?

JM: Aye.

GW: So did you have hens or anything?

JM: Yea, we did at that time.

GW: And would your mother have..

JM: She done the hens. Yes that was aboot the only..she had the hens to look after.

GW: But not milkin the cow?

JM: No, no. I know in dairying a lot o the women do milk the cows right enough, at that time.

GW: Would most smaller places just have one milking cow, or a few?

JM: Most o them just had one - place down there had two right enough. It all depends on how many men you had. If you had four or five men, you would need more than one milking cow. Just a' depends on the staff.

GW: So the milk from your own cow was just for your own consumption. It was never sold or anything?

JM: No. Well, the men that worked for you, they had to get milk as part of their perks as well.

GW: Would they get tatties? They wouldn't have their own supply of tatties cause they were - the ones in the bothies were getting their food anyway.

JM: The like o married couples. They were getting meal and tatties and things like that. I know the ones we had in the bothies wi their meals provided, they didnae need tatties.



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